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ACTION PLAN FOR IMPROVING OMNICHANNEL CUSTOMER EX-  
PERIENCE AND DIGITAL LEAD MANAGEMENT

Master of Science Thesis

Examiner: prof. Nina Helander  
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## ABSTRACT

**HENRI HUOVILA:** Action plan for improving omnichannel customer experience and digital lead management

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Customer experience is an established construct in business, however its strategic importance has been understood only recently. Customer experience starts long before the actual point of purchase, which is why it is important to manage the customer experience throughout the customer's buying journey. Customer experience management has become a key focus area for companies as characteristics of value creation and customer relationship management have evolved through time towards customer engagement. Digitalization has also impacted the concept of customer experience and digital technologies have introduced a digital dimension to traditional customer experience, enabling a sense of omnichannel experience for customers. The purpose of this thesis is to study how lead nurturing through digital technologies can be utilized in creating an omnichannel customer experience in a business-to-business (B2B) environment and present an action plan of how to achieve the organizational state of being able to reach tangible benefits from omnichannel customer experience and digital lead management.

This thesis consists of a theoretical part and an empirical part. The theoretical part is conducted as a literature review related to traditional conceptions of customer experience as well as digital customer experience enablers from strategy, culture, competence and technology perspectives. The theoretical part also includes a review into the concept of customer journey and its relations to omnichannel customer experience. The empirical part is carried out as a qualitative interview research, where various stakeholders from the target organization as well as external experts were interviewed to formulate an understanding of the current and desired target states of the thesis focus areas in the organization. Empirical study results were further analyzed to formulate action recommendations for the target organization based on both theoretical and empirical findings.

The results of this study revealed that to be able to leverage digital lead nurturing for creating an omnichannel customer experience and achieve tangible results require major efforts from a traditional B2B company with low or moderate digital maturity level. The main issues are related to sufficient digital technologies and tools, competences as well as processes that need to be properly defined, managed and utilized to be able to manage leads digitally and nurture them efficiently as well as create a seamless omnichannel customer experience.

## TIIVISTELMÄ

**HENRI HUOVILA:** Toimintasuunnitelma monikanavaisen asiakaskokemuksen ja digitaalisen liidien hallinnan kehittämiseksi

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**Avainsanat:** asiakaskokemus, asiakaspolku, monikanavainen, liidien hallinta, markkinoinnin automaatio

Asiakaskokemus on nykyään vakiintunut käsite liiketoiminnassa, mutta sen strateginen merkitys on ymmärretty vasta lähivuosina. Asiakaskokemus alkaa muodostua jo kauan ennen varsinaista ostotapahtumaa, minkä vuoksi asiakaskokemuksen hallinta koko asiakaspolun ajalta on tärkeää. Asiakaskokemuksesta on tullut keskeinen fokusalue yrityksissä, kun arvonluonnin ja asiakassuhteiden hallinnan ominaispiirteet ovat kehittyneet viime vuosina kohti asiakkaiden osallistamista. Digitalisaatio on myös osaltaan vaikuttanut käsitykseen asiakaskokemuksesta ja digitaaliset teknologiat ovat tuoneet uuden, digitaalisen ulottuvuuden asiakaskokemukseen, mikä mahdollistaa monikanavaisen asiakaskokemuksen luomisen. Tämän diplomityön tarkoituksena on tutkia, miten digitaalista liidien hallintaa voidaan hyödyntää monikanavaisen asiakaskokemuksen luomisessa yritysten välisessä liiketoiminnassa (B2B), sekä esittää toimintasuunnitelma, miten organisaatiot voivat saavuttaa tilan, jossa konkreettisten hyötyjen saaminen monikanavaisesta asiakaskokemuksesta ja digitaalisesta liidien hallinnasta on mahdollista saavuttaa.

Tämä diplomityö koostuu sekä teoreettisesta että empiirisestä osuudesta. Teoreettinen osuus on suoritettu kirjallisuuskatsauksena, jossa käsitellään perinteisiä käsityksiä asiakaskokemuksesta ja digitaalisen asiakaskokemuksen mahdollistajia sekä strategisesta, kulttuurisesta, kompetenssi- että teknologianäkökulmista. Teoreettisessa osuudessa tehdään myös katsaus asiakaspolkuihin sekä tunnistetaan niiden yhteys monikanavaiseen asiakaskokemukseen. Empiirinen osuus on suoritettu kvalitatiivisena haastattelututkimuksena, jossa haastateltiin monia keskeisiä sidosryhmiä sekä kohdeyrityksestä että yrityksen ulkopuolisia alan ammattilaisia, joiden myötä muodostettiin ymmärrys kohdeyrityksen nykytilasta sekä tulevaisuuden tavoitetilasta diplomityön keskeisiin tutkimusalueisiin liittyen. Empiirisen tutkimuksen tulokset analysoitiin sekä yhdisteltiin aiempiin teoriahavaintoihin, jotta pystyttiin muodostamaan tutkimuksen tuloksina esitettävät toimenpide-ehdotukset kohdeyritykselle.

Tutkimuksen tulokset paljastivat sen, että pystyäkseen hyödyntämään digitaalista liidien hallintaa, mahdollistaakseen monikanavaisen asiakaskokemuksen ja saavuttamaan konkreettisia tuloksia niistä, vaatii se lukuisia toimenpiteitä perinteiseltä, alhaisen tai kohtalaisen digitaalisen maturiteetin B2B-yritykseltä. Pääasialliset haasteet ja kehityskohteet liittyvät sopiviin digitaalisiin teknologioihin ja työkaluihin, kompetensseihin sekä prosesseihin.

## PREFACE

This Master's Thesis was completed for Valmet Technologies while working in the Customer Solutions team in Information Technology department. Conducting this thesis was a challenging and interesting journey and I would like to thank everyone in Valmet who took part in it, one way or another. Especially I would like to thank Sampo Vörgren for dedicated guidance and support throughout the journey.

This thesis was supervised and examined by professor Nina Helander from Tampere University of Technology, who also provided guidance, valuable insights and positive feedback throughout the research process, making it possible to achieve the results I sought after. I would like to thank her for that.

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Tampere, 15.3.2018

Henri Huovila

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## APPENDIX A: Interview outline

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMINOLOGY

B2B	Business-to-business.
B2C	Business-to-customer.
CRM	Customer relationship management, often also referred to as customer relationship management system.
Customer journey	A journey that consists of different stages that a customer goes through when making a purchase. Customer journey can also be referred to as customer buying journey, customer purchase journey or customer decision journey
Lead	Lead is nurtured to a point that it has become a potential sales opportunity that is interested in doing business with the company.
MA	Marketing automation is a software for automating marketing activities and taking care of lead management activities digitally
Nurturing	Nurturing (also lead nurturing or customer nurturing) aims to develop the relationship with the potential buyer and the company by systematically and automatically providing relevant content according to the customer's buying journey. Nurturing aims to generate new sales with fewer resources due to automation.
Omnichannel customer experience	Omnichannel customer experience is considered as a seamless and personalized experience that stays consistent across all interaction channels between a company and a customer during a customer journey.
Prospect	An identified suspect that has indicated some kind of interest towards a certain offering or solution of a certain company.
Opportunity	Opportunity or a sales opportunity is confirmed as being fit for doing business with the company.
Suspect	An identified visitor on a certain digital channel, e.g. website.
Visitor	An unidentified visitor on a certain digital channel, e.g. website.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background and motivation of the research

Every company provides a customer experience (Richardson 2010), however the significance of customer experience has not always been understood as companies have not been focusing on creating a positive experience to its customers until recently. Managing customer relationships was heavily transaction-oriented until the early 1990s. Only in late the 1990s and early 2000s companies started focusing on establishing positive relationships with customers, in other words, focusing on creating a superior customer experience and creating value for customers throughout the entire lifecycle of a product. (e.g. Hollyoake 2009, Kumar & Pansari 2016)

Recently, customer experience management has become a top priority in many companies (e.g. Kumar & Pansari 2016, Zolkiewski et al. 2017) as creating a unique customer experience can provide significant economic value for companies (Verhoef et al. 2009). Customers, especially in business-to-business (B2B) context seek after positive experiences and strong strategic partnerships that is built on trust (e.g. Hollyoake 2009, McLean 2017). However, traditional concept customer experience, as all other aspects of business, is going through major renewal due to digitalization and being an early adopter of digitalizing customer experience can provide a significant competitive asset for companies. Data has become the key driver of change that is disrupting all aspects of business across all industries. (e.g. Porter & Heppelmann 2014, Ross et al. 2017)

Digitalization has generated new digital interaction channels for customers. Digital customer experience is created through all digital interactions between a customer and a company (e.g. Calhoon 2015). As the number of interaction channels have increased, it has become crucial to create a seamless experience across all the channels to establish a positive customer experience. Providing a seamless, consistent and personalized experience across all interaction channels between a company and its customers, is referred to as providing an “omnichannel customer experience” (e.g. Bell et al. 2014, Peltola et al. 2015, Parise et al. 2016). New digital technologies and other capabilities have made it possible to gather data from all different digital channels which can be leveraged to understand customers’ behavior better. Data and digital capabilities have also made it possible to outline customers’ purchase and decision journeys that they tend to take when making new purchases and investments. (e.g. Edelman & Singer 2015, Minkara 2016)

Understanding customers’ behavior better enables creating personalized solutions and proactively promoting these new solutions to customers. Thus, digital technologies can



also be leveraged for lead generation, lead nurturing and other lead management activities. (Järvinen & Taiminen 2015) Creating a comprehensive omnichannel experience and utilizing digital lead nurturing effectively requires also fundamental organizational changes (e.g. Porter & Heppelmann 2015) especially for companies with low or moderate digital maturity, e.g. traditional B2B companies (e.g. Kane et al. 2016, Ross et al. 2016), which can cause challenges if not managed properly. Business-to-consumer (B2C) companies have been in the forefront of utilizing digital technologies and channels in generating new business as well as creating an omnichannel experience, which stands out in previous research, as majority of research related to digital customer experience is conducted in B2C context. Therefore, approaching digital lead nurturing and omnichannel customer experience in B2B context brings a new perspective to the previous research.

The target organization of this thesis is Valmet Technologies, which is a global B2B company that supplies and develops technologies, automation and services for paper, pulp and energy industries. Valmet's vision is to become the global champion in serving its customers and therefore focusing on customer experience is a high priority in the organization. However, digital and omnichannel elements are lacking from the total customer experience at the moment. There is an increasing interest towards harnessing digital channels to business use, e.g. to gather a "360 view" of customers based on all available channels and generate new leads through website and other digital channels. Due to digitalization of business, there are several digital initiatives and development projects ongoing in the organization that aim to improve the digital maturity of Valmet as well as enhance the state of digital customer experience.

## **1.2 Objectives and research questions**

The main objective of this thesis is to determine how the target organization could enhance its current lead nurturing activities for creating an omnichannel customer experience using digital technologies. The outcome of the thesis should be twofold. First of all, there should be a proposal on how the beginning of a customer journey should be managed in order to utilize full lead nurturing potential and creating an omnichannel customer experience. Secondly, since creating an omnichannel experience has several organizational requirements, there should be a comprehensive action plan proposal on how to achieve the desired target state of creating an omnichannel experience. Therefore, the main research question is:

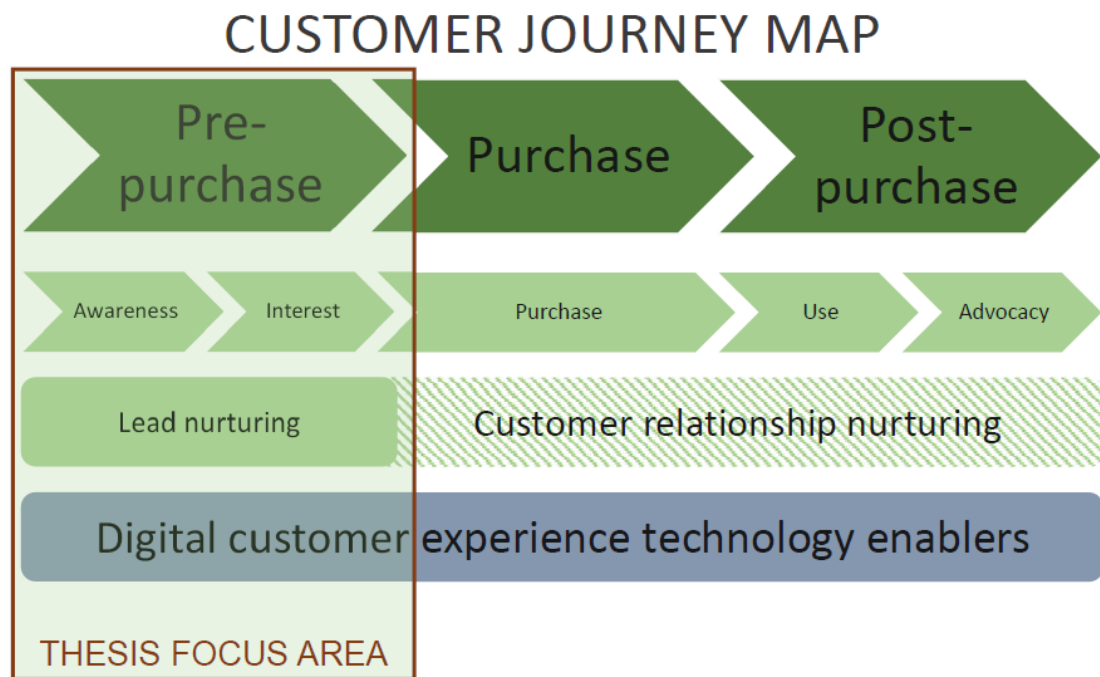
- How to enhance lead nurturing activities for creating an omnichannel customer experience in B2B context using digital technologies?

The answers to the main research question (RQ 1) is conducted based on answering the following supportive research questions (RQ 2-5):

- What are the main elements of B2B customer experience?

- What kind of organizational requirements does creation of a digitalized customer experience have on traditional organizations?
- What digital capabilities are needed for automating lead management activities?
- How to create an omnichannel customer experience in a B2B context?

There are three main subjects in this research, that are omnichannel customer experience, lead nurturing and digital technologies. Each of these three subjects can be fitted in a customer journey format to examine how they cohere. Lead nurturing is a significant lead management process (e.g. Järvinen & Taiminen 2015) and lead management is closely related to managing the beginning of a customer journey of the customer journey (e.g. Mirsch et al. 2016). Therefore, the focus area and scope of this thesis is the beginning of the customer journey, known as the pre-purchase stage, and digital technologies around the pre-purchase stage that could enable a seamless omnichannel experience to customers. Figure 1 depicts the scope in a simplified customer journey format.



**Figure 1.** Thesis focus area.

As figure 1 shows, the research scope is limited to the pre-purchase stage of the customer journey. The research is limited also to composing a high-level view of managing customer experience and digital technologies within the entirety of the pre-purchase stage. Therefore, more detailed approach e.g. on the process-level of awareness of interest phases of the journey is outlined of this thesis. Digital technologies are also approached on a high-level and therefore e.g. architectural mapping of technologies and information systems is left out of this thesis.

To reach the objectives of the thesis, a qualitative research is conducted by interviewing mainly the key internal stakeholders in the target organization as well as some external specialists around digital customer experience and technologies. During the interviews, the objective is to formulate an understanding of the current states of digital lead management and omnichannel experience efforts as well as the desired target state as the interviewees perceive it. The objectives from the target organization perspective is to build awareness in the organization about the importance of the digital and omnichannel elements of customer experience as well as the potential of digital lead generation and nurturing.

### **1.3 Research approach and outline of the thesis**

This chapter briefly outlines the research approach and outline of this thesis. The research approach that is chosen is abductive reasoning (or abductive approach). Timmermans and Tavory (2012) stated that abductive approach is adopted as imaginative thinking based on empirical findings and then revisiting the previous literature to validate the conjectures that were risen from the empirical study. Abductive approach is productive when the research objective is to discover new type of variables or relationships (Dubois & Gadde 2002) and this thesis aims to study the relationships between the three main research focus areas (omnichannel experience, digital lead management and digital technologies).

Due to novelty of the research focus areas, a comprehensive literature review is conducted to provide sufficient theoretical background for the empirical research. Then, the theoretical findings are revisited when validating the conjectures that rose during the empirical study, as Timmermans and Tavory (2012) introduced. The theoretical research in this thesis is conducted as a literature review. The main objective of the theoretical research is to formulate insights for approaching the research questions and providing a sufficient introduction to the focus areas of the empirical study. In addition to formulating insights, the literature review aims to answer research questions 2 and 3.

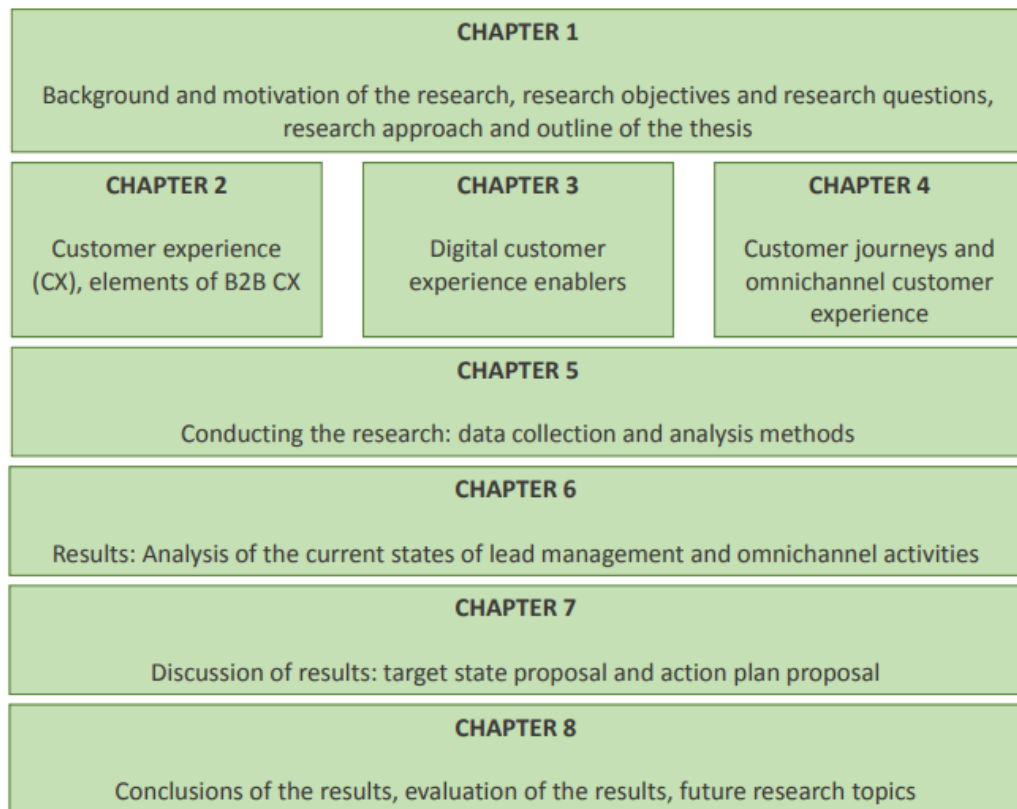
The empirical part of the thesis is a qualitative research that is conducted by comprehensively interviewing employees of the target organization as well as certain external experts of managing digital leads and digital customer experience. The interview methods and analysis methods are described more thoroughly in chapter 5. Qualitative data refers to data that has not been quantified (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 480) and is based on meanings that are expressed through words (Saunders et al. 2009, p 482). Hirsjärvi et al. (2007, p. 156) add that the aim of qualitative research is to find or uncover facts rather than verify assertions of truth, which is aligned with the research objectives of this thesis.

The abductive research approach enables applying a combination of action research and case study as a research strategy in this thesis. Avison et al. (1999) state that action research is an iterative process that combines theory and practice and it encourages re-

searchers to experiment through intervention. This research focuses on building awareness and thus aiming to involve sufficient internal stakeholders to take part in developing current organizational attitudes, roles and processes towards digital benchmarks.

The case study part of the research strategy is actualized by performing a current state analysis and proposing action recommendations based on an empirical study. Case study as a research strategy is fruitful when the objective is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the context of the research (Saunders et al. p. 146). Dubois and Gadde (2002) add that the best way to understand the interaction between a phenomenon and its context is through an in-depth case study. According to Saunders et al. (2009, p. 146), case study strategy also has a significant ability to formulate answers to ‘how’ type of research questions, which is why case study is also a suitable research strategy in this thesis.

Structure of the study is depicted in figure 1.



**Figure 2.** *Outline of the thesis.*

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 present the theoretical findings that formulate the basis for the empirical study. Introduction of how the empirical study was conducted is presented in chapter 5, which describes also the qualitative data collection and data analysis methods more deeply. Chapter 6 presents the empirical findings from the study and it is focused on describing the current state of the research topics in the target organization. Chapter 7 is

discussion of the results, where action recommendations are proposed. Chapter 8 concludes the thesis by answering the research questions, evaluating the results and presenting potential future research topics.

## 2. CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

This chapter introduces the concept of customer experience and its main elements. Further, the relation between customer experience and value creation are discussed. Most importantly, this chapter answers to research question 2: “*What are the main elements of B2B customer experience?*”

### 2.1 The elements and development of customer experience

The concept of customer experience has recently gained a lot of recognition among academic practitioners and enterprises as one of the most crucial ways to gain competitive advantage and it is also one of the top managements’ objectives across all industries. Customers today are more demanding than ever and the ability to provide high quality customer experience during the whole journey, from the customer’s buying process to the end of the lifecycle of a product or service, has become an essential prerequisite for remaining competitive in business. (e.g. Hollyoake 2009, Kettunen et al. 2016, Lemon & Verhoef 2016)

Customer experience encompasses many elements from traditional marketing and customer service topics. Customer experience is defined in multiple ways in literature and its different elements have been researched from various standpoints, such as customer behavior, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, customer engagement, service quality or experience and branding (Lemon & Verhoef 2016, Pansari & Kumar 2016, Homburg et al. 2017, Zolkiewski et al. 2017). In general, academics argue that the concept of customer experience is multidimensional and it implies customers’ involvement at different levels. The levels of customer experience are comprised of social, sensorial, emotional, cognitive, physical, behavioral and affective elements. Each level of customer experience is important in order to compose a consistent customer experience. (e.g. Lemon & Verhoef 2016, Zolkiewski et al. 2017)

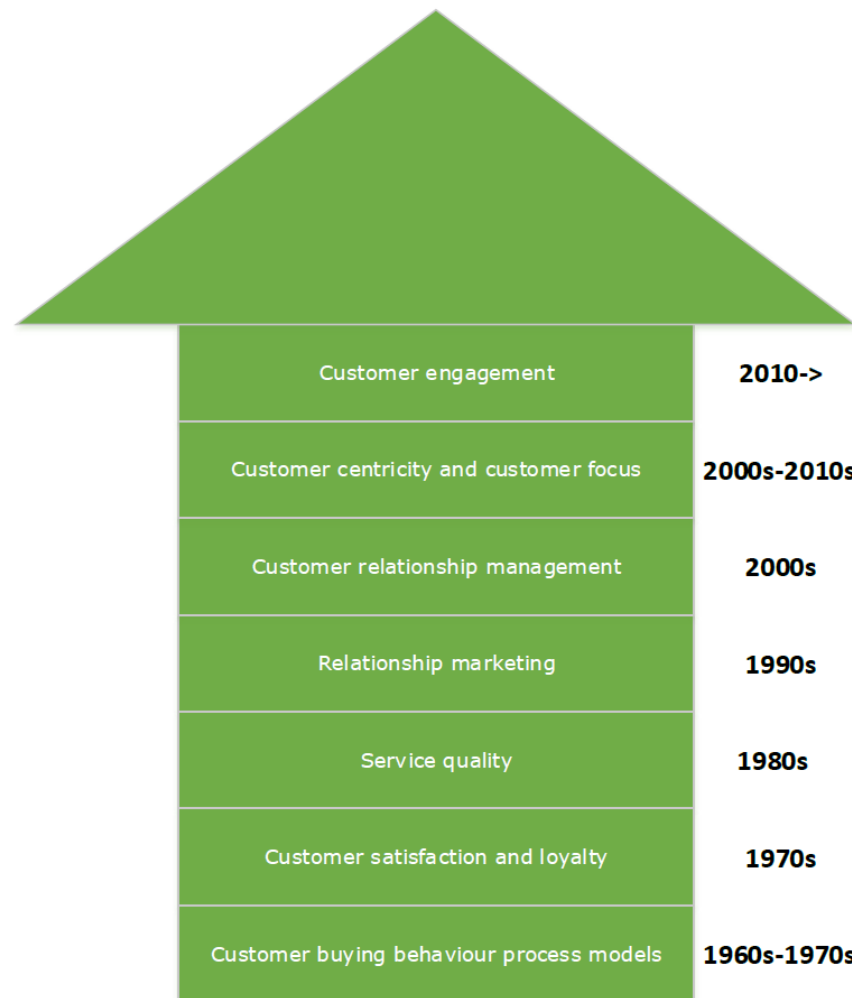
Verhoef et al. (2009) state that “*customer experience originates from a set of interactions between a customer and a product, a company, or part of its organization, which provoke a reaction.*” Interactions can happen through multiple different channels during the buying process and the total experience needs to be constant regardless of the channel (e.g. Redding 2015, Flaherty 2016). Meyer & Schwager (2007) define customer experience as “*the internal and subjective response customers have to any direct or indirect contact with a company.*” They elaborate that direct contact usually occurs during purchase, use, and service and in direct contact customer usually acts as the initiator. Indirect contact usually involves spontaneous encounters with representatives of a company’s products, service or brands. Indirect contact can also be for example advertising, word-of-mouth

recommendations, or news reports in various digital or offline channels, for example social media and communities. (Meyer & Schwager 2007, Verhoef et al. 2009) Lemon and Verhoef (2016) argue that customer experience is related to all aspects of a company's offering.

One key aspect to notice is that the all components that form the customer experience are not created nor controlled only by the seller. Some elements that are out of the company's control are e.g. influence of peers or purpose of shopping. (Verhoef et al. 2009) Even though companies cannot control each element of customer experience, it still needs to be consistent across every touchpoint. Touchpoints represent interaction points between a company and a customer. Customer experience formulates the total experience during the whole customer journey, which starts from getting aware of the brand (pre-purchase stage), moves on to purchase and use of the product or service and ends in after-sales services phases (post-purchase stage). Customer journey is comprised of the paths that customers take between myriad of touchpoints within different interaction channels when buying a product or service. Customer journey aims to identify how the customer experience is created and how it develops during the journey. (Verhoef et al. 2009, Lemon & Verhoef 2016)

Customers always have an experience when they make a transaction or interact in any way with the company (Berry et al. 2002). Lemon and Verhoef (2016) add that every service exchange during the customer journey leads to a customer experience. The experience can be either good, bad or indifferent and therefore, companies need to manage the experience as efficiently as possible. (Berry et al. 2002) Meyer and Schwager (2007) argue that company's goal is to provide a positive experience to the end user. That requires understanding of customer's value chain and more specifically at which point of the customer's value chain the company can contribute and create value.

The concept of customer experience has developed and broadened a lot through past centuries. According to Lemon and Verhoef (2016) the roots of customer experience trace back to the 1960s and since then roughly every decade has introduced a new dimension of customer experience. Figure 3 presents the development phases from the 1960s, when research on customer buying behavior started to emerge, to the 2010s what has been called the era of customer engagement.



**Figure 3.** *Layers of customer experience (adapted from Lemon & Verhoef 2016).*

As it can be seen in Figure 3, research on customer buying behavior process models formed the basis of the concept of customer experience in the 1960s. Researchers started to investigate the buying process of that the customers that they utilized when they were buying products. The first objective was to understand how and where the customer experience developed positively or negatively throughout the buying process. The second objective for researchers was to determine a general customer decision making process based on the buying process. (Lemon & Verhoef 2016)

The next dimension is customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction consists of a series of experiences during the customer journey and it can be considered as the net result of the good experiences minus the bad experiences (Meyer & Schwager 2007). Lam et al. (2004) add that customer satisfaction results from a working relationship between customer and the company. Customer loyalty usually drives customer satisfaction and satisfied customers are typically more loyal to the brand. Pansari and Kumar (2016) as well as Wangenheim and Bayón (2007) identified a link between customer satisfaction and profitability.



Service quality has a significant role in total customer experience. The research on service quality in the 1980s started to shift the focus of customer experience away from product-centric way of doing business towards providing after-sales services. In addition to service quality, relationship marketing also approaches customer experience from a service-point of view. Service quality and relation marketing introduce a more customer-oriented baseline in business relationships (Lemon & Verhoef 2016). Before relationship marketing the main objective for companies was to maximize sales to customers and business was heavily transaction-based.

Relationship marketing shifted the focus significantly from transactions to developing customer care models to achieve better customer relationships. (Pansari & Kumar 2016) According to Berry (1995), relationship marketing aims at maintaining customer retention by providing value to existing customers rather than putting the main focus on attracting new customers. Eggert et al. (2008) add that relationship marketing relates to customer value as it can be improved by either increasing relationship benefits or decreasing relationship costs. Relationship marketing aims to build a long-lasting, mutually beneficial partnership by providing high quality services as well as products to customers (Pansari & Kumar 2016).

The emergence of more customer-oriented perspective on managing customer relationships and providing customer experience in the form of service quality and relationship marketing triggered a research interest towards the whole concept of customer relationship. As well as customer experience, customer relationship itself is composed of many levels that reflect the development and depth of customership during the customer's journey. Some customers are occasional buyers whereas some highly satisfied customers are extremely loyal to the brand and are the most profitable customers for the company. The goal of customer relationship management is to understand customers' needs at each level, maintain positive relationships with customers, increase customer satisfaction and most importantly offer value-adding services to them to build loyalty in the customer relationship. (e.g. King & Burgess 2008, Pansari & Kumar 2016). Customer relationship management aims to optimize customer profitability and customer lifetime value (Lemon & Verhoef 2016) as well as maximize outputs beyond the point of sale (Pansari & Kumar 2016).

Customer centricity adds another dimension to the concept of customer experience as figure 3 shows. As it was discovered in earlier dimensions of customer relationships, satisfied customers are usually more loyal to the brand and therefore are the most profitable customers. Customer centricity derives from research that is focused on the impacts on treating customers individually and delivering personalized value rather than focusing on marketing to mass markets (e.g. Verhoef et al. 2009, Lemon & Verhoef 2016). In recent literature, it is widely acknowledged that customers seek personalized experiences (e.g. Järvinen & Taiminen 2015, Melero et al. 2016). The objective in customer centricity is to literally put the customer to the center and understand their business, preferences and

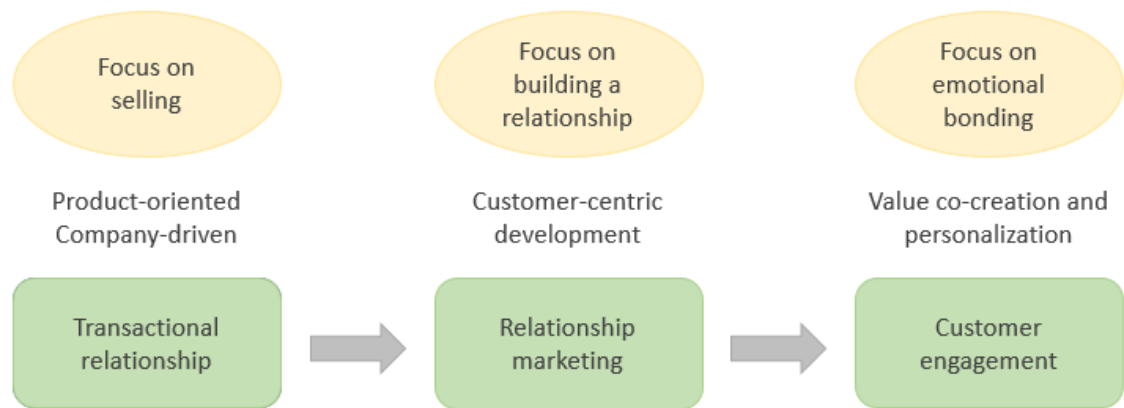
specific needs to be fulfilled. Customer centricity requires a lot of data about the customers and therefore the rise of information systems and other digital technologies are widely utilized when aiming at customer-centric experiences. (e.g. Lipiäinen 2015, Lemon & Verhoef 2016)

Most recently the research on customer experience has been focused on the construct of customer engagement (e.g. Lemon & Verhoef 2016, Kumar & Pansari 2016, Pansari & Kumar 2016) and it has become the primary goal of many organizations' business strategies. Customer engagement is considered as the deepest level of customer management and it is based on customers' emotional aspects about the company and its brand (e.g. Kumar & Pansari 2016, Pansari & Kumar 2016). The previous dimensions of customer experience before customer engagement have had more reactive than proactive approach towards customer experience. Pansari and Kumar (2016) state that in today's globalized business it is not anymore enough to only reactively satisfy the customer needs to make them profitable and maintain customer retention over time. Thus, a more proactive approach to customer experience is required to ensure profitability and sustainable competitive advantage. Customer engagement can also be seen as the means of customer's value addition to the company through interactive touchpoints, such as conversations on social media and other communities, negotiations between sales representatives or other employees of the company (Lemon & Verhoef 2016).

This new focus of customer experience has resulted in a shift from reactive relationship marketing based customer management to emotionally connecting and engaging customers in all possible ways during their customer journeys by proactively supporting the value creation process (Pansari & Kumar 2016). Another aspect how companies benefit from engaged customers is the increased trust that customers have in the company, which is often followed by a willingness to provide the company with more information about themselves (e.g. Hollyoake 2009, Bhandari et al. 2017). Customers may for example enable access to their product or performance data (Porter & Heppelmann 2015). This data can then be analyzed and refined into valuable insights by companies to better understand its customers and engage with them accordingly (Pansari & Kumar 2016) as well as to create totally new business models based on customer data (Porter & Heppelmann 2014, Porter & Heppelmann 2015).

If we look back, the goal of relationship marketing was to build long-lasting customer relationships by providing high quality services and products to customer. Additionally, the era of customer centricity focused on developing customer-specific product and service offerings. Customer engagement combines these two dimensions as it shifts the focus even more to personalizing customer interactions and building an emotional bond which emphasizes the role of customer in the value co-creation process that has a positive impact on customer experience. (Lemon & Verhoef 2016)

It is noteworthy that the construct of customer engagement has a few confluences with many of the fairly recent definitions of customer experience (see e.g. Meyer & Schwager 2007 and Verhoef et al. 2009). However, that is both natural and logical, when considering the development of customer experience and the transition from solely transactional customer relationships towards nurturing the customer relationship as well as engaging customers in co-creation of value (see figure 3) throughout the customer journey. Figure 4 summarizes the elements of customer experience.



**Figure 4.** Development of customer experience focus areas (adapted from e.g. Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004, Verhoef et al. 2009, Lemon & Verhoef 2016, Pansari & Kumar 2016)

Customer experience is a holistic and multidimensional construct that focuses on customer's emotional, behavioral, cognitive and social responses. Despite the type of the customer (organization, end user, consumer) customer experience is always perceived personally (Zolkiewski et al. 2017) and thus needs to be personalized (e.g. Verhoef et al. 2009, Lemon & Verhoef 2016) to achieve engaged and loyal customers.

Companies' role is to act as customer experience enablers and their primary focus should be providing environments that contribute to creating experiences for customers (Pansari & Kumar 2016). Companies prosper in the market when they combine functional and emotional benefits in their solution offerings, because emotional bonds between companies and engaged customers are difficult for competitors to separate. Customer experience is also hard to copy and therefore it is a pre-eminent competitive asset (Berry et al 2002). The end goal of creating a positive and bonding customer experience between customer and the company is to extract and capture more value from this satisfied and emotionally connected customer through co-creation.

## 2.2 The relation of value creation to customer experience

Value creation correlates strongly with managing and delivering customer experiences. It is crucial for companies to understand where the experience during the customer journey is enhancing or destroying value in the eyes of the customer (Hollyoake 2009). Offering superior customer value is necessary for companies to create and maintain long-term relationships with customers. Companies must be able to continuously adapt to changes in their customers' value demands to maintain successful partnerships with their customers. Not adapting to the value change may result in a deterioration or destruction of the relationship. (Eggert et al. 2006)

In practice, companies can choose between two value creation strategies, either a reactive strategy or a proactive strategy. Within the reactive option, suppliers try to adapt to customer value changes whenever they occur. The preferred strategy, however, should be to anticipate customer value change. (Eggert et al. 2006) The value creation process has developed from traditional value-in-exchange model towards a system that creates customer value through use of a product or service. In the value-in-exchange model, value creation is highly product- and company-centric and customers have little or no role in value creation. Value creation occur through internal activities of the company and customers are separated from the actual value creation process. Customer value is achieved through exchange of money and products or services that companies produce. (Vargo et al. 2008) The traditional value creation model has many names in the literature, e.g. "goods-dominant logic", "manufacturing logic", "old enterprise logic" or "marketing management" (see Vargo & Lusch 2008, Vargo et al. 2008). Table 1 shows the characteristics of traditional value creation process.

**Table 1.** *Characteristics of traditional value creation process (adapted from Vargo & Lusch 2008 and Vargo et al. 2008).*

<b>Value driver</b>	Value-in-exchange.
<b>Creator of value</b>	Company.
<b>Value creation process</b>	Through activities of the company. Value is realized through exchange of goods or services and money.
<b>Role of company</b>	Produce and deliver value.
<b>Role of customers</b>	Use value that company created.
<b>Purpose of value</b>	Increase wealth of the company.

As mentioned above, the value creation logic has been rapidly shifting from product-oriented system to a service-oriented system where the aim is to deliver personalized experiences to customers (Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004, Vargo & Lusch 2008). This newer system is based on value that is achieved through use of a product or service and is introduced as *service-dominant logic* of value creation by Vargo et al. (2008) and Vargo and Lusch (2008). This notion of value-in-use suggests that no value is achieved until a solution offering (product or service) is used by a customer.

As value shifts from delivering solutions to providing experiences, the market is also changing. Conversation and interactions between customers, customer communities, network partners, and companies are becoming the locus of value creation and through these interactions customers want to co-create value with companies (Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004). According to Maechler et al. (2016), the interaction can occur anywhere in the customer journey, not just at the point of goods-exchange or customer service as it occurred in the traditional value creation process

Value co-creation is about collaborative creation of value by the company and customer in a mutually beneficial relationship (Vargo et al. 2008). Customer is not an “*omnipotent king*” per se but rather an equal partner. Therefore, company’s goal is not to merely please the customer but rather act as an equal partner. (Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004) In value co-creation, the company enables the customers to construct the experiences themselves in collaboration with the company (Vargo et al. 2008). Customer experience should be personalized for each customer in value co-creation process. This does not mean that the product has to be unique for every customer – products can be similar but the experience needs to be perceived personally. That said, value co-creation focuses on experience-variety rather than product-variety. In the value co-creation model, companies need to create experience environments that foster the (co-)creation of new experiences and engenders dialogue. A personalized co-creation experience reflects how the customer chooses to interact with the experience environment that the company generates. (e.g. Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004, Vargo et al. 2008) Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) state that the key to gain new competitive advantages are creating high-quality interactions that enable each customer to co-create unique experiences with the company.

As Eggert et al. (2006) mentioned, companies must be able to continuously adapt to changes in their customers’ value demands to remain competitive. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) add that these changes are best understood in direct interactions with customers, thereby co-creating value with them. Companies must learn as much as possible about the customer through interacting with them. The information flow must be centered around the customer and enable active participation in the co-creation experience. The purpose is about developing methods to gain a mutual understanding of co-creation experiences so that companies can co-shape customer expectations and experiences along with customers. (Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004) Table 2 shows the characteristics of the new value creation model (value-in-use).

**Table 2.** *Characteristics of value-in-use value co-creation model (adapted from Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004, Eggert et al. 2006, Vargo & Lusch 2008).*

<b>Value driver</b>	<b>Value-in-use.</b>
<b>Creator of value</b>	Company, customers and partners.
<b>Value creation process</b>	Companies propose value and co-create value in collaboration with customers.
<b>Role of company</b>	Propose and co-create value, provide service.
<b>Role of customers</b>	Co-create value with company through interactions during customer journey.
<b>Purpose of value</b>	Nurture mutually beneficial customer relationship through service and cooperation, contribute to customer success.

Moving the locus of value creation towards value co-creation implies transforming the understanding of value towards a service system that integrates internal and external resources e.g. employees, customers, technology and information to create personalized experiences. Service systems co-create value through interactions throughout the customer journey (Vargo et al. 2008). Informed and active customers are increasingly co-creating value with the company. The companies that can successfully co-create unique experiences with customers will prosper in future. (Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004)

### **2.3 Main elements of B2B customer experience**

Research of different dimensions and elements of customer experience has mostly focused on business-to-consumer (B2C) context. Business-to-consumer companies have been forerunners in delivering customer experience compared to B2B companies and many of the dimensions of customer experiences introduced in chapter 2.1 stem from B2C context. The reason for this is the differing characteristics of the businesses. In B2B markets customers more often look for a long-term strategic partner to guarantee ease of doing business in the future. (e.g. Hollyoake 2009, Hänninen & Karjaluoto 2016) When any difficulties emerge, B2B companies rather complain to the customer service or other company representatives, whereas B2C customers may simply just abandon the product or brand when they feel even slightly dissatisfied about it (Hollyoake 2009). Eggert et al. (2006) add that typically, B2B customers also have a stronger need for personal interaction and service. Therefore, B2B customer experience has its own characteristics that slightly differ from B2C-oriented customer experience.

In a B2B environment, decisions are usually made by a group of people and the decision-makers may not be the end users of the products or services that are being purchased (Hollyoake 2009). It means that B2B purchase decisions are based on combined satisfaction of different groups of people in the organization (Pansari & Kumar 2016). Therefore, the company has a lot of responsibility in co-creating the experience in a way that takes every different perspective into account within the customer organization. When the customer organization is satisfied as a whole, it is possible to start building a long-term relationship that generates sustainable revenue for a long time. (Hollyoake 2009)

However, not every dimension in the concept of customer experience has emerged in the B2C industry. According to Vargo and Lusch (2008), the need to develop collaborations and long-term partnerships with customers have stemmed from B2B context. B2B sector was early in recognizing that customers are not buying just output in a form of a product, but rather the service capabilities of that output. Nurturing long-term service- and customer-oriented customer relationships is more demanding in B2B context and therefore the number of customer relationships is usually a lot fewer than in B2C companies. In addition, B2B customer relationships are a lot more complex and have a large number of interactive touchpoints during the customer journey that need to be managed properly (Hollyoake 2009). Zolkiewski et al. (2017) add that the complexity arises because touchpoints in B2B context are more likely to occur across a wider range of front- and back-office functions. B2B sector also recognized the value-in-use model of value creation in relation to value-in-exchange. (Vargo & Lusch 2008)

Meyer and Schwager (2007) argue that in a B2B environment a positive experience is most importantly trouble-free and reassuring to decision-makers. Zolkiewski et al. (2017) state that more than anything B2B customer experience should be based on reducing customer effort. Table 3 composes other important factors from literature that are crucial for high quality customer experience from B2B perspective.

**Table 3.** Important B2B customer experience factors (adapted from Kandampully, 1998, Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004, Hollyoake 2009, Pansari & Kumar 2016, McLean 2017).

<b>Factor 1</b>	Understanding of customer needs
<b>Factor 2</b>	Ease of doing business
<b>Factor 3</b>	Customer knowledge
<b>Factor 4</b>	Customization/Personalization
<b>Factor 5</b>	Interactive experience environment
<b>Factor 6</b>	Value for time
<b>Factor 7</b>	Emotional cohesion
<b>Factor 8</b>	Promise fulfillment

These factors in table 3 are not in any particular order of importance and therefore should all be considered when managing B2B customer relationships. The first factor on the list implies that companies must have a clear understanding of customers business and needs to assure that they are able to solve the business problems that the customer have (e.g. Hollyoake 2009, Earley 2014, Pansari & Kumar 2016). Being able to show that the company understands the specific needs and are willing to solve them, builds trust and integrity between the company and the customer. Ease of doing business implies that all interactions, such as buying process and customer service are straightforward, transparent and goes according to plan. Ease of doing business is emphasized when negotiating contracts and providing technical support. Thus, ease of doing business is heavily based on effective communication between all stakeholders. (Hollyoake 2009) Ease of doing business requires honesty and reliability between the buyer and seller as well as reliance on each other.

As it was explained in the previous chapter, customer-centricity is in the core of creating a positive customer experience in general (Lemon & Verhoef 2016). In practice, being customer-centric is heavily based on gathering and utilizing customer knowledge as effectively as possible. Companies need to have a lot of knowledge about the customer's, buying behavior, processes, market that they are operating in and business in general in order to align their own activities in a way that supports the customer's buying journey. In addition to customer knowledge, companies need knowledge also about customers' customers to fully satisfy the most fundamental customer needs. (Hollyoake 2009) Gathering customer knowledge systematically enables creating better customer experience



overall and utilizing customer knowledge in a right manner builds trust and integrity between the buyer and seller.

In a B2B context, companies focus more on the functional aspect of the product or service being sold, compared to B2C. In other words, the solution that is co-created by the company and customer must fit perfectly to the customer need. Almost always this means that the off-the-shelf solution isn't suitable for B2B buyers and it needs customization to some extent. (Hollyoake 2009) In addition to customization of products, B2B customers value proactive personalization of interactions, services and the whole experience itself (Parise et al. 2016). Personalization can be considered as the next level of customization and it is a crucial component when aiming at state-of-the-art customer experience (MacDonald 2012). The ability to personalize experiences deepens the customer relationship on multiple levels.

As stated in chapter 2.1, companies' target for creating good customer experience should be to provide an interactive experience environment where customer can co-create their unique experience with support from the company (Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004, Pan-sari & Kumar 2016). This holds up also in B2B context (Hollyoake 2009). In practice, to create that environment companies need to enable an easy-access to all valid information during each phase of the buying journey. B2B companies should utilize multiple interaction channels for customers to contact them with ease and aim for transparent communication across all channels (e.g. Melero et al. 2016, Parise et al. 2016). When companies ensure that support is constantly available, it improves reliability and credibility of doing business with the company (McLean 2017).

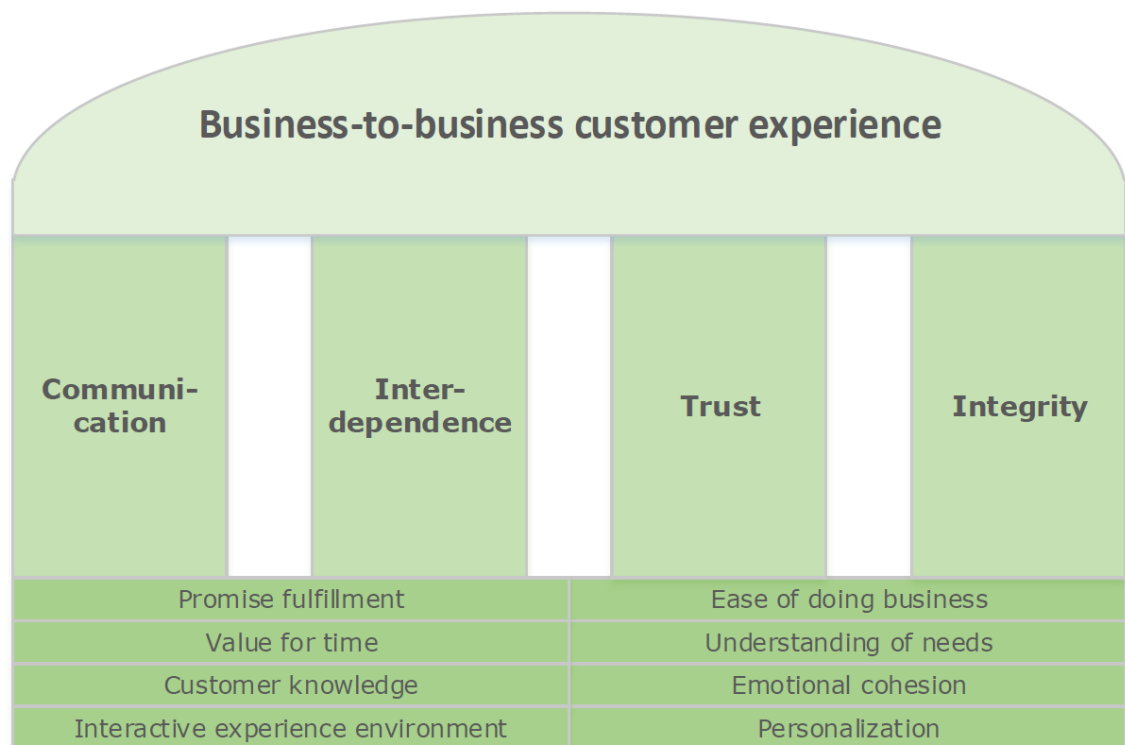
B2B customers value fast deliveries and executions of projects. Time is a widely recognized form of waste according to lean principles and therefore excess time should always be minimized to maximize efficiency. (Dahlgaard & Dahlgaard-Park 2006). That being said, companies need to minimize waste of time to guarantee a positive customer experience to its B2B customers. When a company can ensure faster deliveries together with high quality solutions, it has a positive and long-lasting impact on customer experience (Bolton 1998). Understanding the value for time improves reliability in the relationship (Hollyoake 2009).

Despite B2B customers tendency to focus more on functionality of the product or service when making a purchase, the emotional bond between the company and the customer is essential for creating a superior B2B customer experience (e.g. Berry et al. 2002, Edelman & Singer 2015). Emotional aspects have a strong impact throughout the whole customer journey (e.g. Lemon & Verhoef 2016, Machler et al. 2016). Each touchpoint from narrowing down the potential suppliers to sales negotiations, purchase and all other touchpoints in between during journey develops either positive or negative emotions. High level trust, interdependence and integrity is required to achieve the level of emotional

cohesion that lasts and enables mutually beneficial business relationship. (e.g. Hollyoake 2009, Kumar & Pansari 2016).

Keeping promises and meeting the expectations are generally considered as prerequisites when doing any type of business. However, companies don't always manage to keep or meet them because of scheduling conflicts, lack of information or other kind of complication. According to Hollyoake (2009), B2B customers are generally more demanding in getting precisely what they paid for compared to B2C customers. Exceeding expectations has many positive impacts on customer experience. Exceeding customer expectation and fulfilling promises deepens the emotional bond between the business partners and has a strong impact on building trust and integrity (e.g. Kandampully 1998, McLean 2017).

The eight customer experience factors that were discussed above clearly share certain similarities. Therefore, these factors can be constituted as a basis upon which to create the actual building blocks of B2B customer experience. Hollyoake (2009) recognizes four building blocks that can be built on these eight key factors of customer experience. The four building blocks are trust, integrity, interdependence and communication. Together these key factors and building blocks formulate the elements of B2B customer experience that are presented in figure 5.



**Figure 5.** *The elements of B2B customer experience.*

The elements of B2B customer experience are composed of the key factors that the actual B2B customer experience building blocks are built on (figure 5). The eight most im-

portant factors form the basis of creating a positive B2B customer experience. These factors share certain similarities and each of these factors contribute to same four building blocks that shape the B2B customer experience in a positive way. When all the eight customer experience factors are recognized and properly managed, it can be assumed that the customer experience provided is spotless and solid from the customer's point of view.

However, if one or more of the eight factors are not properly managed during the customer journey, the building blocks will not keep their balance and customer experience deteriorates. Therefore, all the factors should always be kept in mind and developed further when managing B2B customer relationships. Together the eight customer experience factors and four building blocks form main elements of customer experience in B2B context.

### 3. DIGITAL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE ENABLERS

This chapter focuses on the organizational prerequisites for creating a digital customer experience. First, the concept of digitalization is covered as an introduction to digital business in general. Then, all different organizational aspects of digital customer experience are discussed thoroughly based on previous literature. The main objective of this chapter is to formulate a theoretical basis for answering the research question 3: “*What kind of organizational requirements does creation of a digitalized customer experience have on traditional organizations?*”

#### 3.1 Digitalization of business

Digitalization is an ongoing megatrend that influences every industry and according to Kane et al. (2016), practically every industry will be disrupted by it. Digitalization can be considered as a synonym to digital transformation, or in an industrial context, digital disruption (Haffke et al. 2016), which emphasizes the transformational use of digital technologies that is increasing in business throughout every industry. Information technology is already the backbone of many companies, but they may not see information technology as a competitive asset. However according to Ahlemann (2016), digital transformation will disrupt the ways of thinking. Hafsi and Assar (2016) state that digital transformation means utilizing digital technologies in order to immensely improve the company’s performance and ways of operating. Korhonen and Valli (2014) define digitalization as an expansion or transition of business entirely towards digital channels, digital contents and digital transactions.

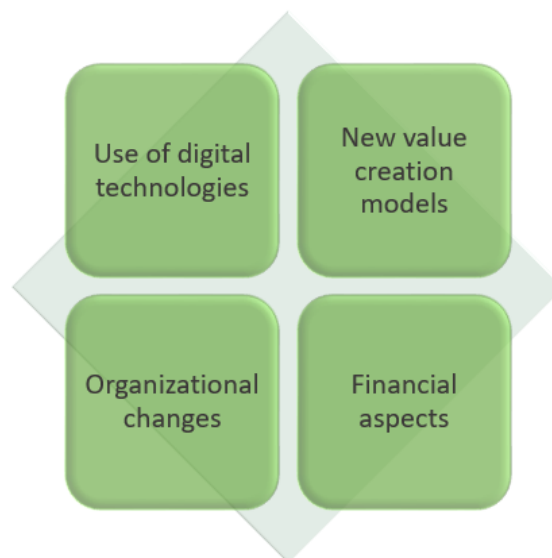
Adding to Hafsi and Assar’s (2016) statement above, the role of digitality has expanded rapidly in the recent years. They continue that only less than few decades ago digital technologies were perceived only as a communication media, whereas in today’s business environment digital technologies are an important and ever-growing way of generating revenue in companies. Digitalization has introduced many new interaction channels for customers, for example mobile devices, digital assistants on websites and social networks (Haffke et al. 2016). Customers also have realized the value of digital solutions and ease of doing business in digital environment and therefore constantly demand more digitalized experiences (Earley 2014). Thus, digitality has also gained an increasingly important strategic role in companies (Haffke et al. 2016).

Digitalization is not merely a choice or an opportunity for any company (Kane et al. 2016). According to Haffke et al. (2016), rapid development of technologies has already

transformed the fundamentals of many industries. Established companies need to understand that in order to stay competitive in a rapidly shifting business environment, it is imperative to go digital (Kane et al. 2016). Digital technologies are revamping the essence of physical products giving them a smart and a connectivity capabilities. Thus, digitalization is transforming both companies and competition in the market. (Porter & Heppelmann 2014, Porter & Heppelmann 2015)

Most importantly digitalization enables new ways of doing business and improving internal processes (e.g. Earley 2014, Kane et al. 2016). As digitalization in companies advances, the pace of collaboration, problem solving, innovation, and value co-creation are also increasing due to emergence of new digital tools (Earley 2014). These digital tools make it possible to gather business insights from data, which in turn result in a cycle where innovation could lead to new digital business, new ways to create value for customers and new ways to capture value for the companies themselves. (Haffke et al. 2016)

However, digitalization is a major challenge for several, especially traditional companies (Ahlemann 2016) and companies need to manage the digitalization processes properly in order to achieve positive financial results from it (Porter & Heppelmann 2015). While adding new digital capabilities, it also increases complexity in products and processes and may result in reduced productivity in some cases (Earley 2014). Porter and Heppelmann (2015) state that digital transformation processes differ by industry and company and there are not any specific guidelines that would apply for every company. As said above, digital transformation strategies across different industries approach the digital challenges from different perspectives. However, regardless of the industry or company, digital transformation strategies share certain similarities. These similarities can be divided to four central elements, which are visualized in figure 6.



**Figure 6.** Elements of digital transformation towards digital maturity (adapted from Matt et al. 2015, Gill & VanBoskirk 2016)

As figure 6 sums up, new digital technologies are emerging and they enable developing new digital business models and improving internal processes. The internal improvements include for example restructuring processes more efficiently and automating manual processes or process steps with digital technologies (Kane et al. 2016). Disruption is inevitable also in organizational context due to new digital capabilities. Organizational changes, such as acquiring new digital talent and reorganizing organizational structures are necessary in order to support the digital transformation. Organizational cultures in traditional companies need to change in order to adapt to digital capabilities. (Matt et al. 2015, Kane et al. 2016) Earley (2014) adds that in order to succeed in the digital transformation process, employees need to be committed to deliver the results.

Last dimension to be considered in digital transformation is financial aspects. Digital transformation naturally requires numerous investments but when managed properly, digital business solutions have enormous potential to yield sustainable profit (Matt et al. 2015). Despite being a major challenge for many organizations (Ahlemann 2016), companies that anticipate the changing customer needs of the constantly evolving markets and successfully utilize new digital capabilities, put themselves in a good position to gain new competitive edge over their competitors (Earley 2014). According to Calhoon (2015), in the age of the customer in today's business environment, it's impossible to deliver great customer experience without digital technologies, therefore investing in digital is vital for survival.

### **3.2 Technological aspects of creating a digital customer experience**

Business today is highly dependent on information systems. The role of information systems has shifted fundamentally from being merely operational tools to being important strategic assets that have potential of developing new value creation models (Hafsi & Assar 2016) and therefore, organizations must get better at managing information as a strategic asset (Earley 2014). Ross et al. (2016) argue that companies need to have a technological backbone that contributes to operational excellence, which they call the “*operational backbone*”. Operational backbone ensures that data is reliable, secure, easy to access and can be transparently used between core systems (Earley 2014, Ross et al. 2016). To emphasize the importance of a robust operational backbone, McLean (2017) argues that data quality has a direct impact on providing positive customer experience.

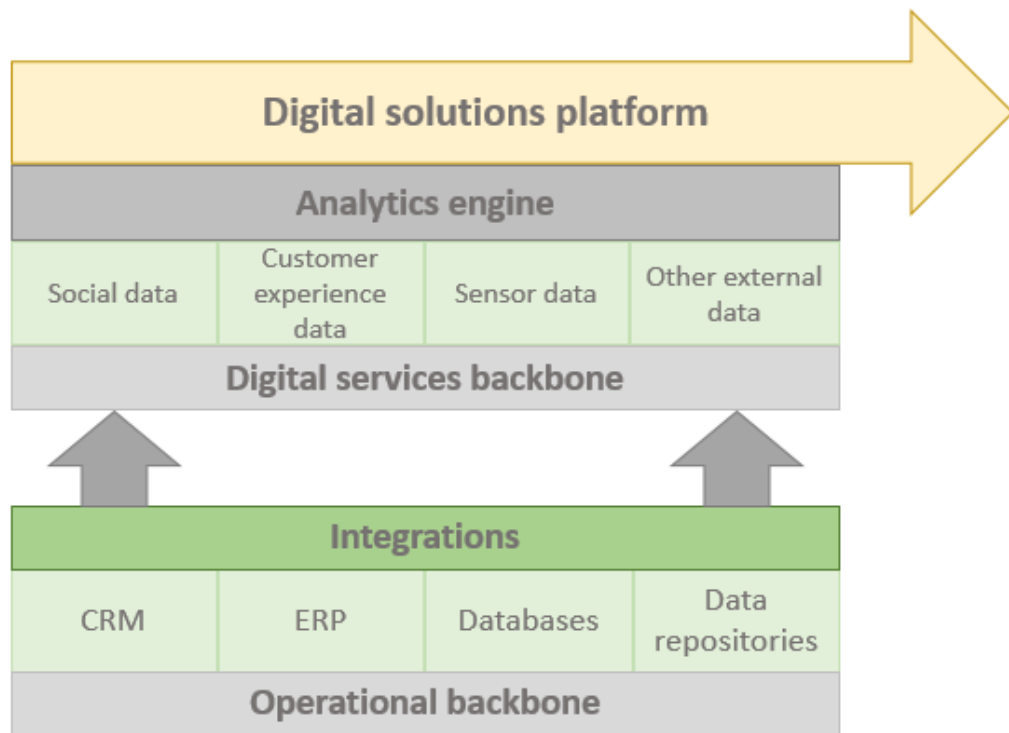
Ross et al. (2016) define operational backbone as “*the set of business and technology capabilities that ensure the efficiency, scalability, reliability, quality, and predictability of core operations*”, therefore the core of operational backbone is the company's information systems built on a technology platform that enables seamless integration across different systems. Hafsi and Assar (2016) state that companies use information systems

to enhance their operational excellence by improving and automating their internal processes with digital capabilities. This process digitalization enables companies to have a more transparent view into their business and manage their performance better. Hafsi and Assar (2016) continue that through a functional operational backbone, operational data can be more easily shared and utilized across the organization to improve decision-making and customer experience.

Most companies' operational backbones rely on certain technology platforms, which are either outsourced or purchased from a platform provider or self-developed (Ross et al. 2016). The most important core components of operational backbones are Enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems, Customer relationship management (CRM) systems, Product lifecycle management (PLM) systems as well as other systems, databases and other data storages that store valuable internal and external data. These core systems ensure the integrity and reliability of company's master data and transactions between suppliers and customers. In a business environment that is rapidly changing, no company will not exist long without utilizing its data assets to process transactions and customer service queries efficiently, reliably, and rapidly. (Ross et al. 2016, Zolkiewski et al. 2017)

Companies need to have a fully-functional operational backbone to succeed in the digital economy. However, operational backbone alone is not enough for achieving success and therefore companies need to build also a digital services backbone on top of operational backbone. Digital services backbone utilizes data from the operational backbone systems as well other sources of data, such as sensor data, customer experience data and social media data. (Ross et al. 2016) That data is utilized for new digital innovations that are critical to business success in the future. Companies can e.g. leverage sensor or other end-user data from connected products and combine them with customer or service contract data from operational backbone to develop new business models. (see e.g. Ross et al. 2017, Zolkiewski et al. 2017) The digital services backbone enables numerous new data-driven services for customers – for example proactive maintenance of installed equipment or personalized sales offers based on product usage data to improve their performance (Ross et al. 2016).

Digital services backbone covers a comprehensive technology stack (e.g. Porter & Heppelmann 2014). Parise et al. (2016) emphasizes the emerging role of cognitive technologies, such as machine learning and artificial intelligence in providing a seamless customer experience during the customer journey with the potential to deepen the emotional bond with customers. To conclude, figure 7 presents a simplified version of the suggested digital technology architecture based on reviewed literature.



**Figure 7.** *Simplified digital technology architecture suggestion for enabling digital customer experience.*

Figure 7 implies that companies need to have a solid operational backbone that functions without conflicts in data management (e.g. storing, sharing, using data). State-of-the-art operational backbone should enable integrations between all key operational systems (e.g. ERP, CRM, databases), which makes master data management more efficient. A sufficient operational backbone acts as a basis for developing digital capabilities on top of company's operational systems. Digital services backbone combines data from operational backbone as well as from external resources, such as sensor, customer experience and social data. Together these sets of data are processed and analyzed with digital tools in analytics engines layer to gain valuable business insights from the data. These data-driven business insights can be refined to digital business solutions, such as new business models and new ways to provide better customer experience. However, it is important to remember that digital technologies are only necessary prerequisites and act as enabler of utilizing the full potential of digital transformation. Digital technologies alone without relevant competences and strategy will not be profitable for companies, as stated in chapter 3.1 (see e.g. figure 6) and elaborated in chapters 3.3 and 3.4.

### 3.3 Necessary digital skills and competences

Organizational skills and competences are a major dimension on the road to being a digitally enabled company. As it was mentioned in chapter 3.1, employees are the cornerstone of making a successful transformation towards data-driven organization happen. Companies need to have certain digital technology skills and other competences up-to-



date to be able to use new digital tools and processes and more importantly utilize them in a way that creates value for customers. The development of digital technologies, however has been so rapid that most, especially non-digital companies, have troubles reacting to the ongoing change. According to Kane et al. (2016) many companies suffer from a lack of resources to develop existing talent or hire new talent that are capable of developing the new digital initiatives and executing the digital transformation processes. Ahle-mann (2016) makes the same recognition and he argues that the qualifications and actual skillsets that digital transformation requires are still fairly scarcely adopted and thus hard to find in the job market.

Despite the crucial role of digital technologies, the skills that companies should be looking for when hiring new digital talent are not all about technology. As mentioned in chapter 3.2, technologies are in the foundation of operational and digital excellences and act only as an enabler when developing new digital solutions, both internally and externally. Kane et al. (2015) state that the most important ability that is necessary for taking advantage of digital capabilities is deep knowledge and understanding of the company's business. Therefore, it is crucial for digital workers to understand the whole value chain of the company and be able to conceptualize how the digital technologies can impact current business processes and value creation models.

In addition to business knowledge, Kane et al. (2017) found that other certain types of characteristics are also needed from new talents. Digital-savvy talent are expected to have change-oriented and forward-thinking attitudes as well as having a transformative vision about the digital capabilities. These characteristics are considered as important or even more important than having the technical skills for working successfully in a digitalized environment. However, sufficient technology skills are necessary to some extent. Kane et al. (2016) mention that companies can more easily improve their digital capabilities by hiring employees with technological backgrounds and then teaching the industry-specific knowledge alongside work, compared to other way around. Also, leaders that have experience on change management and other "soft" skills rather than only technological prowess are sought after by digitally maturing companies. Kane et al. (2016) adds that leaders need to be collaborative team builders with strategic thinking capabilities as well as having a technological mindset.

Certain key technology skills that companies look after, come up in the literature. Kane et al. (2016) state that analytics and mobile are currently the most important technologies to master and cognitive, social as well as Internet of Things technologies are rising rapidly during the following years. Ross et al. (2016) present SMACIT technologies as the most important technologies to master. SMACIT is short for social, mobile, analytics, cloud and Internet of Things. Harrison et al. (2017) recognize the SMACIT technologies, emphasize the importance of advanced analytics and add digital content creation as well as generally a data-driven mindset to the sought-after skills. Harrison et al. (2017) also recognize the importance of mastering mobile technologies as fast as possible because of the

rapidly rising use of mobile devices in business context. However, many companies have not yet put sufficient focus on mobile and therefore it can hinder their market position in the coming years. Kane et al. (2016) also bring up the importance of ecommerce technologies, because online shopping is growing rapidly across every industry, also in B2B context. Lack of these key digital technology competences inevitably result in inability to offer seamless customer experiences during customer journeys according to Harrison et al (2017).

According to Kane et al. (2016), in companies that are in the early stage of digital transformation, employees are more likely to leave their jobs if the company is not able to maintain the pace of transformation. Digital-savvy employees are looking for opportunities to work for companies that will allow them to develop and demonstrate the skills and abilities that they need to succeed in the digital world. Therefore, one of the most crucial issues when hiring new digital talent is the ability to design their future career paths in a way that is aligned with their professional needs and goals to keep the talent employed. (Kane et al. 2017)

### **3.4 Strategic aspects and summary of the organizational requirements**

As Kane et al. (2015) pointed out, solely implementing or using digital technologies without planning will not lead anywhere. Companies need to have a well-articulated strategy of which platforms, systems, tools and other resources must be acquired and managed to achieve the desired business goals. For example, installing a content management software or listening to social media data alone without a plan of how and when to present what kind of content to which customers or how to utilize the social media data for generating more sales, is insufficient (e.g. Earley, 2014).

Companies therefore need guidelines for what to listen for, how to analyze and interpret the data. According to Mithas et al. (2013) “*digital business strategy implies a dynamic synchronization between business and IT to gain competitive advantage*”. Digital strategy and overall corporate strategy should be aligned and treated with equal importance. Kane et al. (2016) state that virtually every digitally maturing company has integrated digital strategy to company’s overall strategy. According to Harrison et al. (2017) however, that is not the case very often and digital strategies are treated separately or not adopted clearly and transparently in companies (Harrison et al. 2017).

Digital strategy should be a crucial part of business strategy that is inspired by the capabilities of easily accessible and digital technologies such as social, mobile, analytics, cloud and Internet of Things technologies that aim to create integrated and responsive business capabilities as well as deliver unique customer experiences in constantly changing market conditions (Ross et al. 2016). Regardless of digital technologies being one of

the central components in digital strategy (see figure 6), the most effective digital strategies are more about reconfiguring existing business processes and organizational structures to take advantage of the information that operational and digital services backbones enable. (Kane et al. 2015) Harrison et al. (2017) continue that digitally maturing organizations have transformed their internal processes, employee engagement and business models using digital technologies.

Kane et al. (2015) suggest that effective digital strategy is more strongly associated with digital maturity level of the company than solely use of multiple digital technologies. According to previous research (e.g. Ross et al. 2016), companies that are digitally most mature, i.e. companies that had recognized the opportunities enabled by new digital technologies had developed a digital strategy that focuses on either customer engagement or digitized solutions. A digitized solutions strategy transforms a company's business model by reshaping what the company is selling. Companies that use digitized solutions strategy combine their different products and services into digital solutions. Digitized solutions strategy aims to enhance existing features of products and services with new data-driven features that help solving customer problems and provide unique value. Companies that adopt a digitized solution strategy may ultimately become service companies with their products being only a single part of the overall service experience. Over time, digitized solutions can transform a company's business model by moving the revenue stream from transactional product-oriented sales to exquisite offerings that create consistent revenue from ongoing services. (Ross et al. 2016, Ross et al. 2017)

Digital technologies can also be considered as a means to create new kind of customer engagement (Kane et al. 2016). A digital customer engagement strategy transforms company's go-to-market strategy that has been in disruption by technological development during recent years. The strategic objective of customer engagement strategy is creating customer loyalty, trust and passion and aim for building emotionally bonding customer relationships by providing consistent and personalized customer experiences. Customer engagement strategy aims to create a seamless, *omnichannel* customer experience so that customers can interact, order, pay and receive support consistently on any channel at all times and thus build trust and loyalty between customers. Because the overall goal is to gain customer loyalty, companies with an effective customer engagement strategy are constantly identifying new opportunities to introduce new channels to interact and emotionally connect with their customers. (Ross et al. 2016, Ross et al. 2017)

When focusing on customer engagement strategy, providing a seamless customer experience requires major changes to instilled corporate behavior and organizational culture (e.g. Earley 2014, Kane et al. 2016). Earley (2014) adds that implementing such changes requires a long-term commitment to objectives that are consistent and aligned with the company's vision. Harrison et al. (2017) therefore suggest that organizations should be built around data and ownerships of digital initiatives should be determined clearly to enable focusing on digital customer experience.

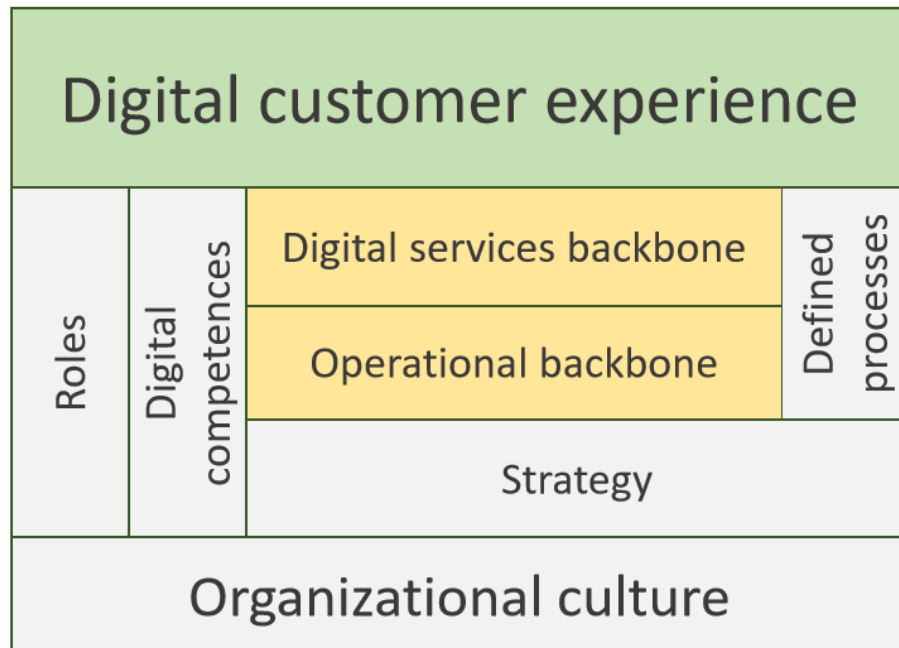
Earley (2014) states that every successful fundamental change in business starts from the employees and an organizational shift towards a data-driven company that focuses on digital customer experience makes no exception. Digitally maturing companies tend to recruit leaders with soft skills, such as people and communication skills, and value them more than technological competence, because according to Kane et al. (2016) leading a digital company does not require technology specialists as executives. High mature companies are reshaping their organizational structures in order to design a consistent, end-to-end customer experience. Ross et al. (2016) point out that majority of high level digital maturity companies plan to develop new core business lines in the next three to five years to adapt to digital trends.

Companies are shaping their departments towards more cross-functional teams to become more agile (e.g. Kane et al. 2016, Breschi et al. 2017). Traditional and formal organizational structures are fading into the background or entirely disappearing. For example, digitally enabled marketing teams include expertise in analytics, digital content creation and social communities on top of the actual marketing operations. These marketing teams work in close collaboration with product development and production to ensure seamless execution of digital initiatives. (e.g. Porter & Heppelmann 2015, Kane et al. 2016, Lemon & Verhoef 2016) New key areas of expertise in addition to traditional fields of business in new cross-functional digital teams are for example design research and anthropology (Breschi et al. 2017).

Because of the ongoing organizational changes, IT departments are also experiencing a fundamental transformation and they will have a more central role in value creation in companies (Porter & Heppelmann 2015, Ross et al. 2016). Ahlemann (2016) adds that also IT departments will work in a close collaboration with product development teams and new cross-functional teams across organization will have employees from IT to guarantee technological abilities. Wood (2015) states that a strong relationship between marketing and IT is necessary for success in digital customer experience initiatives. IT departments will be freed from traditional organizational constraints of being solely a support function and IT developers and managers can focus more on creating value to customers in the future. (Porter & Heppelmann 2015, Ahlemann 2016).

However, the most important component that is required from the organization when aiming at being a high quality digital customer experience provider is organizational culture (e.g. Peltola et al. 2015, Kane et al. 2016). As mentioned in chapter 3.1, digital strategies differ slightly by industry and they approach the digital challenges from different perspectives and circumstances. However, despite the industry, the organizational cultures of all high digital maturity companies share certain characteristics. These characteristics include engaging heavily in rapid and creative experimentation, investing in developing their own talent and encouraging to taking risks. As a result, digitally maturing companies have a strong focus on innovation and are over twice as likely to invest in disruptive technologies than low digital maturity companies. (Kane et al. 2016) Figure 8 introduces

requirements and enablers for providing high quality customer experience composed from literature that was discussed in chapter 3.



**Figure 8.** *Digital customer experience requirements.*

Companies that aim to deliver high quality digital customer experience have to consider multiple matters (figure 8). Solely acquiring and implementing new digital technologies is not enough and will not result in any benefits. Everything starts from the employees and leaders and their digital competences, that are a lot more than only technological prowess, such as business and people skills. Organizations must be willing to change and have an open mind towards transformation.

Companies' culture must be aligned with strategic objectives and the digital business strategy should be communicated transparently across the whole organization. Organizational culture must encourage to innovate and form cross-functional teams. Digital technologies and information systems have crucial roles as backbones that enable digital customer experience. Digital technologies are not the main driver in digital transformation programs. Competences and skills to operate and fully utilize digital technologies and information technologies are needed when developing new digital solutions for seamless digital customer experience.

## 4. CUSTOMER JOURNEYS AND OMNICHANNEL EXPERIENCE

This chapter aims to formulate a theoretical background to research questions 4 and 5: “*What digital capabilities are needed for automating lead management activities?*” and “*How to create an omnichannel customer experience in a B2B context?*” First, the concept of a sales funnel is introduced, which acts as a prerequisite in understanding the concept of a customer journey. Then, the different stages and other aspects of customer journeys as well as the concept of omnichannel experience are discussed more thoroughly. Lastly, the business potential of investing in digital lead management and omnichannel experience capabilities in B2B companies is evaluated.

### 4.1 Sales funnel

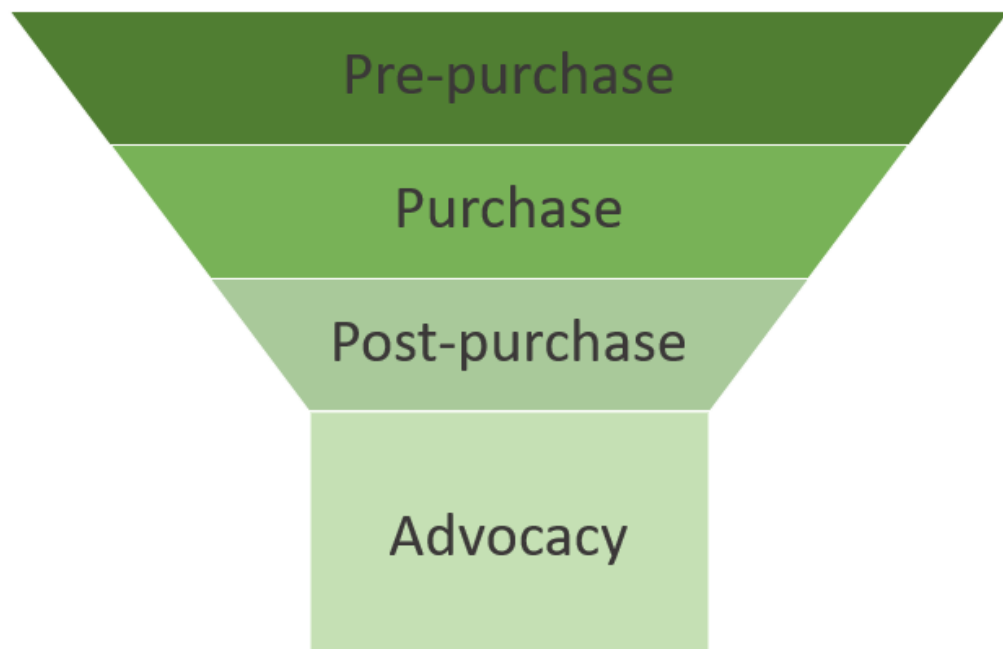
Both B2C and B2B customers proceed through certain touchpoints when buying a product or a service and these touchpoints formulate a customer buying process. Companies need to understand the customer buying process and align their own sales processes to support the customer buying process at each activity in order to create a positive buying experience throughout the journey.

Companies usually depict their sales process as a sales funnel that the potential customer enters and proceeds through each stage of the funnel to become an actual customer. The different activities in the sales funnel are defined in multiple ways in literature. Cook (2014) presents a sales funnel that consists of research, try, purchase, collect and service activities. Robertson (2015) divides the sales funnel in buy and use phases that are constituted from need, research, evaluate, select, receive, use, maintain and replace activities. Jackson (2009) introduces a model that he calls REAN (reach, engagement, activation and nurture) as the ideal representation of the sales funnel. Bhandari et al. (2017) divides the sales funnel to awareness, interest, trial and action, whereas Järvinen and Taiminen (2015) presents a generic sales funnel that is composed of suspects, prospects, leads and deals.

Despite being defined in a slightly differing way, many similarities can be recognized from the sales funnel descriptions above. In most of the definitions, sales funnel is clearly divided in three stages that are pre-purchase, purchase and after purchase. Each of the stages consists of one or more different activities that the customers proceed through during their buying process. In the pre-purchase phase companies should focus on reaching the potential customers and attracting them (Jackson 2009). The goal is to raise awareness of the company and its offerings by providing easy-access content to the suspects, e.g.

using digital media such as a company website. After sufficient research, potential suspects turn into prospects that could be interested in doing business with the company. Prospects are provided with more specific content and information to build a positive image of the company and its offerings as well as its capabilities of being a trustworthy business partner. During last phases of the pre-purchase stage prospects turn into leads that are ready to be contacted from the sales representatives. In the beginning of the pre-purchase stage the responsibility of managing the suspects and prospects is typically on marketing department and when the prospects can be qualified as leads, the responsibility should be handed over to sales representatives. (e.g. Järvinen & Taiminen 2015, Robertson 2015, Bhandari et al. 2017)

The second stage of the typical sales funnel is the actual point of purchase where leads turn to new customers and deals and a new type of customer relationship is built (Jackson 2009, Bhandari et al. 2017). After purchase customers enter a post-purchase stage which covers the remaining lifecycle of the product or service. During post-purchase stage customer relationships should be nurtured to make customers loyal to the company and generate more sales from the existing customers in the future. This stage can be often called customer advocacy in literature. Nurturing describes the methods of retaining and re-engaging with existing customers. (Jackson 2009) In practice customer nurturing is carried out by follow-up emails, targeted marketing, providing customer support and other loyalty programs (e.g. Jackson 2009, Järvinen & Taiminen 2015) Figure 9 depicts an example of a generic sales funnel based on definitions and descriptions above.



**Figure 9.** General sales funnel from pre-purchase to advocacy (adapted from e.g. Jackson 2009, Cook 2014, Robertson 2015).

Companies aim to convert as many suspects to customers as possible but in reality, the conversion rate of suspects and leads to customers is fairly low (Heimbach et al. 2015). Therefore, to improve conversion rate in sales funnel, companies are putting focus on creating compelling customer experiences that start already at the pre-purchase stage of the buying process and stay consistent all the way to the post-purchase stage and beyond (e.g. Lemon & Verhoef 2016, Machler et al. 2016). By mapping the journey that customers go through when buying a product or a service, companies will be able to understand customers better and tailor their experiences accordingly.

## 4.2 Customer journey mapping

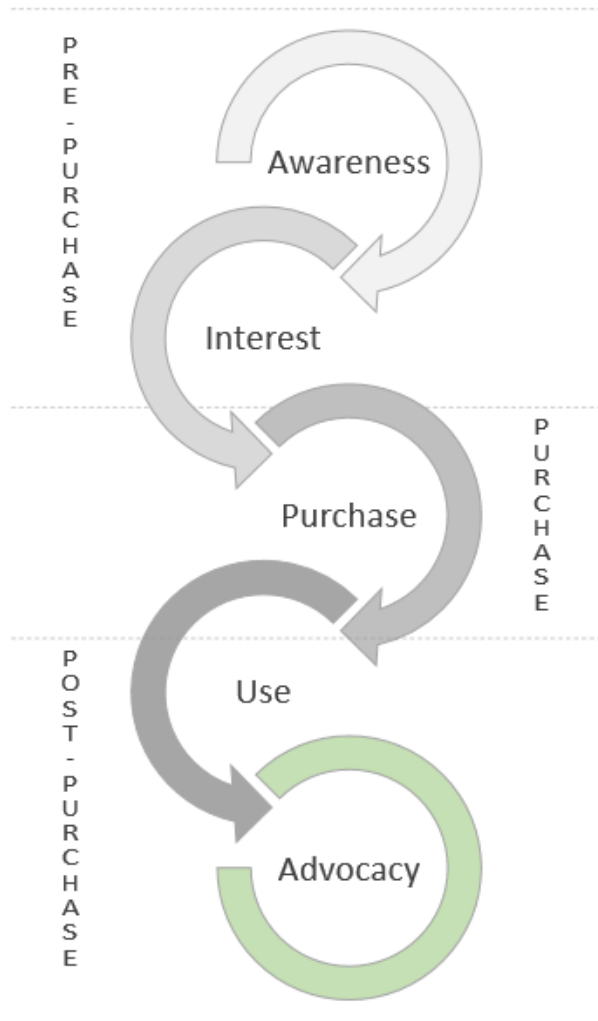
The business environments and competitive landscapes have developed during the last centuries. Customers have become a lot more demanding and therefore companies have had to take a more customer-centric approach in business. Companies nowadays should aim to maximize customer satisfaction at every phase of the buying process to build customer loyalty and stand out from competitors, as it was discussed in chapter 2. Traditionally, companies have approached customer experience only from the perspective of managing and enhancing different touchpoints independently (Hafsi & Assar 2016) in order to achieve improved customer satisfaction (Maechler et al. 2016). Maechler et al. (2016) continue that by focusing solely on improving individual touchpoints, the end-to-end customer experience becomes fragmented. Managing customers' cumulative experience across multiple touchpoints on different channels over time is the key to superior total customer experience.

Most common touchpoints are face-to-face contact, e-mail, phone or customer service on a company website (Hollyoake 2009). Touchpoints can be divided into four categories according to Lemon and Verhoef (2016). The categories are brand-owned, partner-owned, customer-owned and social or external and independent touchpoints. Brand-owned touchpoints are designed and managed by the company itself, for example website, social media sites and advertisements. Partner-owned touchpoints are controlled by a partner, for example a marketing agency or a communications company that in some cases can manage some of the touchpoints, such as certain customer service channels. Customer-owned touchpoints are not in control of the company by any means but play a crucial role in the total experience during the customer journey. Social and external touchpoints are for example peer reviews, word of mouth and other independent information sources that also have a tremendous impact on the total experience. (Lemon & Verhoef 2016)

As stated above, despite touchpoints being crucial interaction points between the customer and the company, the most important thing to focus on from customer experience perspective are the paths that customers take in between the touchpoints (Lemon & Verhoef 2016) to create a seamless end-to-end experience. Customer journey consists of touchpoints and the spaces between them. A generic example of a customer journey map



is presented in figure 10. Customer journey covers the customer's decision-making process end-to-end from the top of the sales funnel to post-purchase services. (Mirsch et al. 2016) Lemon and Verhoef (2016) argue that the customer journey makes up the total customer experience that is composed of all the previously mentioned stages and touch-points the customer goes through during their buying process. Saghiri et al. (2017) refers to the customer journey as value-adding journey, where each stage can include numerous interaction points that create value for the customer.



**Figure 10.** *Generic customer journey.*

Shaw (2013) points out that in a digital world customer experience begins long before any interactions with the company occur, so it is vital to map every customer actions from the pre-purchase stage of customer journey. Being able to design customer journeys provides a significant source of competitive advantage (Edelman & Singer 2015). Zolkiewski et al. (2017) add that instead of focusing solely on customer satisfaction and getting repetitive orders from customers, companies need to understand more about what kind of actions their customers' journeys are composed of and how these elements are linked to their business goals on operational and strategic level. Successfully designing a customer

journey requires a lot of internal and external data about customers and market environment. Data from touchpoints combined with existing data in operational and digital services backbones should be exploited systematically to design engaging customer journeys (e.g. Earley 2014, Ross et al. 2016). Digitally mature companies have already improved their CRM capabilities and started focusing on customer needs by analyzing e.g. transaction data (Kumar & Pansari 2016).

Customers today do not buy just products or services. Breschi et al. (2017) argue that the boundaries between products, services, and environments have blurred as customers are expecting personalized experiences and solutions. According to Heinonen and Michelsson (2010), more and more purchase decisions are aimed at buying into a superior experience. Companies have understood that they must have an integrated view to design end-to-end experiences that create value to customers (Breschi et al. 2017). In addition to personalizing experiences and building customer loyalty, customer journey thinking aims to deliver ultimate service quality (Maechler 2017). Earley (2014) states that improving customer experience begins with leveraging company's digital capabilities and setting clear goals that support business objectives at a detailed process level. As discussed in chapter 2, companies need to create interactive experience environments where customers can navigate effortlessly and successfully across multiple touchpoints. By designing data-driven customer journeys for customers, a seamless and integrated set of interactions is made possible for the customers and it results in a positive experience. (Parise et al. 2016)

Lemon and Verhoef (2016) conclude that companies should seek to understand both the company and customer perspectives of the customer's purchase journey and identify key aspects in each stage to both create a superior experience for the customer and restructure own organization to support providing that experience. Companies should identify most crucial touchpoints that influence the experience and manage all touchpoints as well as paths between the touchpoints holistically. Companies should also gather, analyse and utilize all customer data throughout the journey to identify specific trigger points that make customers continue or discontinue in their purchase journey and tailor experiences accordingly.

### **4.3 Digital channels**

Verhoef et al. (2009) state that customer experience stems from a set of interactions between a customer and a company. Customers increasingly use digital channels for interacting with the company. Ongoing digital transformation has had an impact on sales and communication channels, which has enabled new ways to interact and engage with customers at each stage of the customer journey (Haffke et al. 2016). Digital channels are used in companies for multiple activities such as service delivery or use, taking care of business activities and communicating internally and externally (Heinonen & Michelsson 2010). Heinonen and Michelsson (2010) continue that companies utilize digital channels for research purposes but also when buying products. Willmott (2014) states that majority

of purchases are researched online before making the purchase (online or offline). He adds that more and more customers now prefer to complete the purchase online. Increased use of digital channels has been noted also in B2B context where buying and selling is often considered less straightforward (e.g. Järvinen & Taiminen 2015, Harrison et al. 2017). In B2B context the products and services themselves are often much more complex than in B2C, which leads to higher prices and usually more decision makers that are involved in final purchasing decisions and therefore B2B purchasing is a lot more complicated (Harrison et al. 2017).

Many digital channels serve as digital touchpoints and every single touchpoint between the company and the customer matters. Companies need to systematically gather data from different digital channels and combine it with existing customer data and offline touchpoint data if possible. That helps companies to obtain a 360-degree view of their customers and it helps them understand their customers' behavior across all channels and touchpoints. Doing this will enable companies to know the channel preferences of their customers and see which channels are used at each step of the customer journey. This carefully analyzed and combined knowledge is crucial when designing omnichannel customer journeys as it provides companies with a proper understanding of how a certain customer likes to interact with the company. Omnichannel customer experience is covered more in detail in chapter 4.7. In addition, companies can track and measure the performances of each channel and this information helps companies to identify which channels are generating more sales for the company. (Melero et al. 2016)

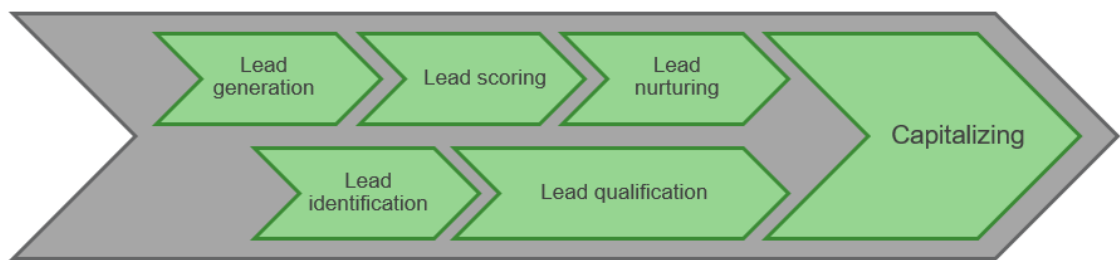
Various digital channels can be utilized at different stages of the customer journey. For example, websites, email, webstores, social media and communities as well as digital ads are commonly used digital channels (Peltola et al 2015, Saghiri et al. 2017). Anderl et al. (2016) add search engines to the list of channels and elaborates on different kind of ads, such as retargeting ad, affiliate ad, mobile ad and in-app ad. Mobile is an emerging technology and companies are recognizing the increasing strategic importance of mobile channels (Peltola et al 2015, Harrison et al. 2017). Anderl et al. (2016) argue that mobile channels enable new location-based touchpoints for companies to utilize and they continue that mobile channels are better suited for searching and gathering information rather than completing the whole purchase on mobile. Digital content has a fundamental role across many digital channels, e.g. search engines, advertisements, website, social media sites and e-mails. According to Järvinen and Taiminen (2015) the most commonly used formats of digital content include pictures, videos and animations, e-books or shorter customer guides, white papers, podcasts, webinars, infographics, blog posts and social media posts.

Customers do not necessarily choose specific channels that they always use, but rather look for the channel that supports their requirements for interaction most accurately at a given time. Companies need to understand the customer value of being able decide which channel to use for interaction at each stage of the customer journey. Many companies

claim to focus on customer experience and satisfaction but numerous companies set only short-term transaction-driven sales goals without putting focus on utilizing all the digital channels properly. When approaching the digital channels from a customer journey perspective, companies can capitalize on them most effectively and start focusing on providing a seamless customer experience. (van der Veen & van Ossenbruggen 2015)

#### 4.4 Pre-purchase stage

The first stage of the customer journey is a pre-purchase stage. From the company point of view, pre-purchase stage of the customer journey can be considered as lead management. Figure 11 outlines an example of a lead management process. Pre-purchase stage typically covers the journey from being a new, unknown visitor or suspect making the initial contact with the company to the phase where the visitor is identified and nurtured to the point that they have turned to sales ready leads. (Järvinen & Taiminen 2015) However, former customers can also enter pre-purchase stage when they are considering making a new purchase in the future and similar kinds of nurturing principles apply to these situations also (e.g. Lemon & Verhoef 2016).



**Figure 11.** Lead management process (adapted from e.g. Jackson 2009, Järvinen & Taiminen 2015)

Pre-purchase stage encompasses all interactions between the customer and the company before a transaction is made. Pre-purchase stage therefore covers awareness and interest phases of the customer journey (see figure 10). Typically, these phases include activities such as need recognition, search and consideration. Pre-purchase stage encompasses experiences from the beginning of the journey to the point of purchase. (Lemon & Verhoef 2016) The main goal of this stage is to gather and identify suspects through different digital channels and turn them into sales qualified leads by nurturing them accordingly (Järvinen & Taiminen 2015).

If we consider a generic customer journey, the first objective is to make potential customers aware of the company and make them navigate to the company's website. According to Järvinen and Taiminen (2015) customers become aware of the brand either actively or passively. Active awareness covers instances when customers are proactively searching for potential solutions to their business problems and finding a suitable search result. Passive awareness covers instances when customers are exposed to e.g. an advertisement on

a certain digital channel, such as a website, search engine, social media site, email or mobile application. Second objective for the company is to identify the visitor. A new visitor becomes a suspect when the company becomes aware of the visitor. (Järvinen & Taiminen 2015)

The process of capturing the suspect however is not easy. Companies can use specific digital tools to catch the suspects. As the sales funnel (see figure 9) shows, not every visitor will not turn to suspect nor every suspect will turn into prospect since the potential customer can be lost at any point of the sales funnel due to various reasons. The company must make the very first website visit compelling and warm so that it engenders positive feelings about the company and makes them come back to the website again (Järvinen & Taiminen 2015). Earley (2014) points out that customers have high expectations for digital experiences. Borowski (2015) presented a study that showed that even a ten-second wait when website is loading can make half of the potential customers give up and leave.

Järvinen and Taiminen (2015) argue that creating and delivering relevant and personalized content to target audiences across different digital channels has a high impact on total customer experience. Järvinen and Taiminen (2015) also argue that if a suspect is captured through relevant content marketing, they are more likely to transform to prospects and leads at later stage of the journey compared to other suspects. Earley (2014) adds that customers expect intuitive access to multiple information sources and online visitors want to find potential solutions with minimal effort. Website visitors also want to receive personalized offers and choices that precisely support their needs. The content and functionality must be constantly unified and personalized to the user's current need to create a positive digital customer experience. (Earley 2014)

However, to make personalization possible, the suspects need to identify themselves (e.g. Järvinen & Taiminen 2015, Parise et al 2016). According to Parise et al. (2016) identification usually occurs when customers gives their basic information and a consent to receive personalized content based on their industry and other factors. When a suspect is identified it can be considered as a prospect (Järvinen & Taiminen 2015). Personalization includes providing expertise and solutions based on online behavior such as product browsing, product comparison and service interactions. Personalization often results in positive emotions toward the company because the customer feels that the company values them. (Parise et al. 2016)

In practice, personalization means tailoring interactions based on customer data that is gathered across all touchpoints. Personalization should occur on both online and offline channels accordingly. (Parise et al. 2016) Edelman and Singer (2015) present a case where a retail company configured elements on its website based on data about visitors' online behavior so that some visitors would see more images or videos whereas other people would see more product offers. Personalization is made possible through use of digital technologies. With customer tracking tools and advanced analytics companies can

combine data from different touchpoints and gain valuable insights about customer behavior (Parise et al. 2016). Cognitive technologies, such as artificial intelligence can also be utilized to constantly learn from visitors' online preferences and reconfigure and optimize the site accordingly for each type of visitors (Edelman & Singer 2015). Järvinen and Taiminen (2015) state that the more personal the interaction can be tailored, the more effective it becomes.

The goal of creating personal experiences for identified prospects is to generate a maximum number of leads out of them (see e.g. Edelman & Singer 2015, Järvinen & Taiminen 2015). Nurturing prospects to generate leads relies also heavily on smart and personalized content marketing. According to Hare (2016), only 27% of B2B leads are sales ready when they first share their contact information, which emphasizes the need of nurturing to transform them into sales opportunities and deals. Based on analytics and algorithms, companies should provide right type of content at the right time of the customer journey. Järvinen and Taiminen (2015) present a marketing philosophy called data-driven content marketing, which aims to generate high-quality sales leads by delivering valuable content based on individual customer needs. In prospect phase companies should put focus on targeted content, such as personalized e-mails and newsletters, blog posts related to prospect's business or industry, product videos, product reviews and other whitepapers (Edelman & Singer 2015).

Prospects turn to leads after being nurtured successfully. Leads can be categorized in many ways, for example marketing-qualified leads or sales-qualified leads (Järvinen & Taiminen 2015, Redding 2015, McGill 2017). In some cases, suspects and prospects are considered as marketing-qualified leads (e.g. Redding 2015, McGill 2017). Marketing-qualified lead is not yet ready to be contacted by a sales representative. Sales-qualified leads are nurtured to a point on their customer journey that they are ready to be directly contacted by sales representatives. Therefore, the responsibility shift between marketing and sales departments occurs when a marketing-qualified lead turns to a sales-accepted lead. The handover should be precise and not happen too early or the lead can drop out from the sales funnel entirely due to not being sales qualified. If a lead is contacted prematurely by sales department it can deteriorate the customer experience significantly. (e.g. Järvinen & Taiminen 2015, Redding 2015). Leap (2013) states that 61% of B2B marketers send all leads directly to sales and only 27% of those leads will be qualified as sales ready.

Errors and misjudgements in the lead qualification process result in wasted resources and lost revenue when sales representatives are not able to focus on the most profitable sales-qualified leads. In order to generate maximum amount of sales-qualified leads, companies need to put a lot of effort in delivering relevant content related to the current phase of their customer journey. (Järvinen & Taiminen 2015) According to White (2017) such content is for example personalized premium content, infographics, special offers, case studies and free trials. Järvinen and Taiminen (2015) add that high-quality content does

not focus on company's products or services. Instead it is business problem-oriented and it creates value for customers rather than solely promotes company's offerings.

## 4.5 Purchase stage

The second stage of the customer journey is the actual purchase stage (see figure 10). After several marketing and sales efforts on different channels during pre-purchase stage, sales-qualified leads close out to deals when purchase transaction occurs. Purchase covers all interactions with the company and a customer during the purchase event, such as closing the deal, ordering and payment (Lemon & Verhoef 2016). From digital channel perspective, closing a deal is fairly simple but a few key points stand out in the literature that should be considered when aiming at a consistent and positive customer experience.

Sales negotiations are not always straightforward and they may be ongoing for several years, especially in B2B environment. Once a deal is closed the information is entered in the CRM system. In an ideal case (when MA system is in use), the company can review the actualized marketing and sales activities from the first point of interaction through all other phases of the entire customer journey (Järvinen & Taiminen 2015), because a marketing automation system can be integrated to CRM system (Kemper 2016). If the opportunity is lost for some reason and the deal fails to close, all the information from the previous phases of the journey is stored in the MA software and the customer can be inserted into the marketing pool for future (Järvinen & Taiminen 2015).

Customers, especially in B2B context where size of the orders can be large, such as investments or long-term service contracts, value ease of doing business and look for transparency during the purchase stage, as it was presented in chapter 2. Transparency builds trust and engagement in the customer relationship that are crucial components of a positive B2B customer experience. Digital capabilities enable a transparent view into all types of events related to purchase on different channels in real time. Data from the operational backbone, such as ERP data and CRM data, can be harnessed to provide a transparent view into the status of the purchase. With digital capabilities, customers can also follow the progress of the order or delivery and see alerts related to it on website, ecommerce, customer portal or some other type of digital channel during purchase stage. (e.g. Edelman & Singer 2015)

The most important digital channels utilized in the purchase stage are the company website, an extranet portal, ecommerce or equivalent channel that requires registration to identify customers. Other important channels are traditional e-mail and digital media such as advertisements. Digital content, such as advertisements of related products and blog posts about how to use the newly purchased product properly are valuable to customers on the purchase stage of their customer journey. Most important activities during purchase stage across digital touchpoints and channels are customer service and tracking

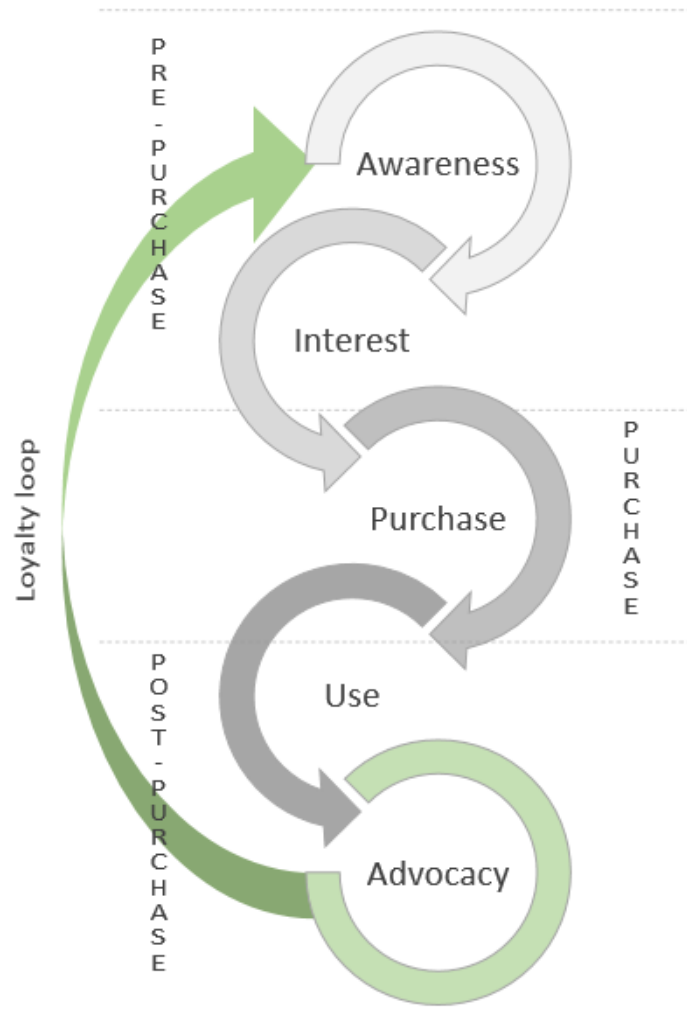
progress of the order or delivery. (e.g. van der Veen & van Ossenbruggen 2015, Edelman & Singer 2015, Lemon & Verhoef 2016)

## 4.6 Post-purchase stage

Third and the last stage of a typical customer journey is post-purchase. Post-purchase stage includes all customer interactions and experiences with the company after the actual point of purchase. Post-purchase stage includes behaviour such as product usage, post-purchase engagement, and customer service requests. The product itself becomes a critical interaction channel with many touchpoints during post-purchase stage. Lately, a concept of “*loyalty loop*” has been introduced as a part of the post-purchase stage that implies that customer journeys, in a way, act as a continuous and iterative process. In other words, loyalty loop (figure 12) suggests that during the post-purchase stage, a trigger may occur that either leads to advocacy through repurchase and further engagement that improves customer loyalty or begins the customer journey process again, as the customer re-enters the pre-purchase phase of the journey. (Lemon & Verhoef 2016)

During post-purchase stage, the main target is to nurture customers in such a way that leads them to the loyalty loop by maintaining a consistent, high quality customer experience resulting in customer retention and advocacy. Customer nurturing, same as lead nurturing in the pre-purchase stage, is a data-driven process. Customer data that was generated during previous customer journey stages as well as previous CRM data can be leveraged for customer nurturing in many ways. (e.g. Järvinen & Raiminen 2015, Bhandari et al. 2017)





**Figure 12.** Example of a customer journey with a loyalty loop for former customers.

Product usage data combined with customer data provides an opportunity to tailor customer interactions (Edelman & Singer 2015). Another innovative example of data-driven capabilities is utilizing cognitive technologies to improve customer experience. Cognitive technologies, such as machine learning and artificial intelligence, can be combined with customer data in CRM system to develop targeted e-mail and other content as well as improve digital marketing efficiency during the post-purchase stage (Bhandari et al. 2017).

As stated already in chapter 2, personalized interactions and service encounters are crucial components in a positive customer experience. Customers in post-purchase stage demand personalized content related to their products and other relevant solutions to maximize the capacity of the products and services in use. Therefore, digital marketing activities such as targeted e-mails, active management of installed base as well as other relevant reports and infographics are increasingly important during this stage of the journey. (e.g. Heinonen & Michelsson 2010, Edelman & Singer 2015, Maechler 2017) Arguably the most important things for companies in the post-purchase stage are to constantly listen to

customers, analyze customers' behaviors, learn from them and apply a customer nurturing program. The objective is to create a positive experience environment for the customers to co-create their own experiences, and thus achieve customer retention and advocacy which results in a mutual beneficial and profitable relationships.

## 4.7 Omnichannel customer experience

Regardless of the stage during the customer journey, customers expect a consistent experience across all digital channels and touchpoints. Therefore, companies have to create and maintain a cohesive set of digital channels and touchpoints. Each touchpoint provides its own unique benefits to customers. They should also complement and be seamlessly connected to each other to formulate a positive total customer experience during the customer journey. It is crucial for companies to constantly align their channel environments with customer needs and maintain a seamless, omnichannel experience to remain competitive. (Mirsch et al. 2016)

The concept of omnichannel customer experience has emerged from retail and B2C industries (Peltola et al. 2015). Customers, also in B2B context, are rapidly becoming omnichannel customers that utilize multiple channels, such as websites, mobile applications and social platforms fluently and in some cases concurrently, at different stages of their customer journey to make a single transaction (e.g. Bell et al. 2014, Parise et al. 2016). Therefore, sellers need to adapt to omnichannel thinking and behavior as well. The focus, also in B2B companies (Harrison et al. 2017), should be on how to implement an omnichannel strategy most effectively. (Peltola et al. 2015)

In literature, the concept of omnichannel experience is widely considered as providing a consistent and seamless customer experience across each channel throughout the whole customer journey (see e.g. Earley 2014, Peltola et al. 2015, Kane et al. 2016, Parise et al. 2016, Harrison et al. 2017). Mirsch et al. (2016) add that omnichannel management refers to the integrated management of all the company's channels and touchpoints and that the aim in omnichannel management is to improve the customer experience across channels as well as maximizing the overall channel performance.

Many, especially low digital maturity organizations, are not well structured for providing their customers with a consistent and seamless customer experience across all channels. Often, the reason is that channel management is divided between multiple departments or teams and no one in the organization is specifically responsible for ensuring the uniformity and consistency of customer experiences across all channels as a whole. (Hoogveld & Koster 2016) Piotrowicz and Cuthbertson (2014) add that even if a company is offering access through multiple channels, there is often a "silo mentality" in managing the channels, which means that channels are treated separately. Siloed mentality results in lack of consistency e.g. in marketing, product, pricing, customer service data and

thereby deteriorates the overall customer experience delivered across all channels. Marketing activities as well as all other interactions and content that is provided must be consistent across all channels to avoid customer confusion. (e.g. Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson 2014, Melero et al. 2016)

Lin (2015) argue that simply maximizing the number of separately managed interaction channels between customers and the company is considered as a multichannel approach to marketing. Omnichannel approach involves systematic and meaningful use of data to understand customers' behavior across each channel and how to make their customer journey more effortless between touchpoints. Mirsch et al. (2016) and Saghiri et al. (2017) add that from a customer perspective, the omnichannel approach would ideally allow customers to use their preferred channels and touchpoints interchangeably and to seamlessly switch between them without losing any progress and having the same access to content regardless of the channel used. Lin (2015) conclude that omnichannel approach recognizes that customers engage with companies in many different ways, using many different digital tools and channels, and aims to solve the challenge of providing a consistent experience throughout the customer journey.

Personalization, that has been discussed in the earlier chapters as well, is at the center of successful omnichannel management (Melero et al. 2016). According to Bhandari et al. (2017), most customers prefer inbound marketing, where marketers and sellers engage customers with relevant content with a customer's permission. Therefore, customers are aware and willing to share information to the company about their purchase habits, demographics, and business in general, and in exchange they demand the personalized experiences (Melero et al. 2016). Customers demand that companies must understand who they are, anticipate what they like, know where they are on their customer journey, deliver what they need and when they need it and make it possible to reach them through their preferred interaction channels. For companies to obtain this level of omnichannel experience, it relies heavily on gathering and analyzing data across all touchpoints to gain understanding of the customer, as well as structuring the organization in a way that supports omnichannel management both competence-wise and culturally, as it was discussed throughout chapter 3 (e.g. Edelman & Singer 2015, Melero et al. 2016, Ross et al. 2016).

Integrated promotion, order fulfillment, customer service and other communications on all digital channels and touchpoints composes the seamlessness in omnichannel experience, according to Peltola et al. (2015) and Saghiri et al. (2017). Peltola et al. (2015) continue that the consistency and integration of channels and touchpoints is the first step when creating an omnichannel experience. Integrated promotion implies that all promotion data, such as product data, and marketing data for all digital channels should originate from same master data to ensure consistent look and feel and pricing across each channel (e.g. Borowski 2015, Peltola et al. 2015, Saghiri et al. 2017).

Integrated order fulfillment refers to seamlessness of purchase stage in the customer journey and it covers activities such as traceability of stock keeping points, delivery points and transport modes across all channels (Saghiri et al. 2017). Integrated customer service implies that service standards are compatible across all channels during each stage of the customer journey and customers can utilize channels according to own preferences to complement their needs (Melero et al, 2016, Saghiri et al. 2017). Consistent communications to customers have a significant impact on seamless customer experience. In digital channels such as social media and email, the consistency of targeted marketing is emphasized. The customer is assumed to get the best experience when offering them a selection of actions in multiple channels that they can choose from to complete all their purchases. (Peltola et al. 2015)

As discussed earlier, managing and providing superior customer experiences requires sufficient technology and software to support it. According to Saghiri et al. (2017) omnichannel support systems need to enable advanced analytics engines, product digitization and cross-channel integration to provide omnichannel visibility to customers. Omnichannel management enables tracking the customers' journeys in real time across multiple channels and eliminates the need of asking customers to give repetitive information about themselves (e.g. Edelman & Singer 2015, Peltola et al. 2015), therefore MA, CRM and other operational systems have to be utilized when creating an omnichannel experience. According to Borowski (2015), when a company's MA and CRM software doesn't track all interactions, and tie them together across all channels (e.g. website, ecommerce, social media, email, phone, live chat), the customer will receive a fragmented digital customer experience. Parise et al. (2016) argue that digital technologies also bring new omnichannel features for customer relationship management that were not previously available, such as possibility for screen sharing in customer service on multiple channels during pre- and post-purchase stages of the journey, that contribute to the seamlessness of experience.

According to Peltola et al. (2015) good omnichannel experience has two key objectives. First objective is reducing the risk of losing the customer during customer journey by providing consistent and seamless customer experience through service encounters and interactions across multiple channels. Second objective is to encourage customers to proceed in the customer journey by providing seamless and intuitive transitions across different touchpoints by analyzing customer needs, behaviors and preferences. In addition to remarks that Peltola et al. (2015) pointed out, Daigler et al. (2015) identify four crucial characteristics that companies should focus on when pursuing an omnichannel experience: personalization of experiences, consistency of experiences through each channel, user experience development based on customer behavior and having own frontline employees transparently collaborating with each other and being committed to providing omnichannel experience.

Providing a consistent and seamless customer experience – omnichannel customer experience – is a key factor for success in all businesses today. Harnessing a company towards

omnichannel capabilities requires concrete changes on all organizational levels (Peltola et al. 2015). Companies with high digital maturity can be seen as forerunners in providing omnichannel experience. Companies need to utilize their operational and digital services backbones in order to create an omnichannel experience as well as enable new service and other business possibilities for their customers.

## **4.8 Marketing automation and its business potential**

As discussed throughout chapter 4, creating an omnichannel customer experience across the customer journey and harnessing sufficient lead management capabilities are not easy tasks for companies. In order to effectively manage customers' journeys, companies have to utilize different technological capabilities. One tool that stands out in the literature is a marketing automation software (see e.g. Heimbach et al. 2015, Järvinen & Taiminen 2015, Redding 2015, Wood 2015, Kemper 2016). Marketing automation capabilities improve lead generation and it enables marketers to target leads with the right content at the right time of their journey and to response quickly to online queries. Marketing automation software also allows lead scoring to rank leads based on their significance and potential and based on this score, marketers can advance the most promising leads to sales representatives as fast as possible. (e.g. Järvinen & Taiminen 2015)

According to Wood (2015) and Heimbach et al. (2015) marketing automation prospers in a B2B environment and use of marketing automation has great potential in improving conversion rate, cross-selling and customer retention. The core of marketing automation is an automatic personalization of marketing activities (Heimbach et al. 2015). Marketing automation software can serve both existing customers and potential customers (e.g. leads and sales opportunities) more effectively by targeting content and improving their interactions across touchpoints across different channels (Kemper 2016). Marketing automation software is in the core of developing and delivering a relevant content strategy. Marketing processes, such as customer segmentation, marketing campaigns and customer data integration can be automated using marketing automation software. Automated marketing processes allow focusing on less profitable customers with a lot lower costs through automation and thereby allocating human resources on more profitable customers. (Bagshaw 2015) Data and information stored in the marketing automation software also allows relevant nurturing of leads that were lost at some point of their customer journey and rejoin the journey at a later point of time (Järvinen & Taiminen 2015).

Marketing automation encompasses a software platform that can be used to deliver content based on user-specific rules and where the customer is located on its purchase journey (Järvinen & Taiminen 2015). Marketing automation software can store data related to e.g. online behavior, keywords used in a search engine, type of referral, location, device used, browsing history, position on the customer journey, purchase history, activity on website, previous preferences, most efficient content and so on. This data triggers a set of rules

that automatically suggest what kind of content or offer should be presented to the customer using certain type of interaction channel, for example highlighting certain solutions on the company website, sending a personalized e-mail or tailoring a personalized landing page for a website. (Heimbach et al. 2015) Järvinen and Taiminen (2015) add that the objective of marketing automation is to attract, build and maintain trust with existing as well as potential customers by automatically personalizing relevant and useful content to meet their specific needs at each phase of their customer journey.

Wood (2015) argues that marketing automation benefits come from efficiency and timeliness that cannot be matched by human marketers and the ability to personalize experiences based on data. Järvinen and Taiminen (2015) as well as Redding (2015) point out that one significant benefit is that marketing automation allows companies to align their marketing and sales organizations and systems. Kemper (2016) adds that marketing automation software has the ability to fully utilize the capabilities of CRM systems when integrated adequately. Järvinen and Taiminen (2015) argue that poor integration between marketing and sales systems causes insufficient lead follow-up which in turn causes majority of the marketing-qualified leads to disappear in the sales funnel. Redding (2015) adds that insufficient lead follow-up leads to marketing department passing on too many leads to sales department too early, which unnecessarily burdens company's sales resources. Richards (2017) pointed out that lead generation is the most important objective of marketers in B2B companies, whereas lead nurturing was ranked as the third most important objective after brand building. Marketing automation is emphasized in order to achieve these objectives.

Marketing automation requires integration of different kinds of skills. Knowledge of marketing, sales and consumer psychology as well as relevant digital technologies, tools and information systems in general are required. However, the potential benefits of marketing automation are significant in the entire lead management process as well as in learning about customers' journeys and their behavior. Marketing automation helps to align marketing and sales departments and the reporting and tracking capabilities of marketing automation software can create more efficient analytics that provides valuable insight for improving both marketing and sales strategies. (Kemper 2016) According to Richards (2017), 79% of leads never convert into a sale because of misalignment of sales and marketing and qualifying the lead for being handed over sales too soon.

Marketing automation relies heavily on the technology stack that is needed for digital transformation (see chapter 3), therefore systematical integration and collaboration of IT and marketing departments is necessary to utilize full potential of a marketing automation software (e.g. Heimbach et al. 2015, Järvinen & Taiminen 2015). According to Kemper (2016) marketing automation makes marketing operations more transparent, drives sales opportunities, improves marketing accountability and enables measuring the return on investment (ROI) of marketing.

Marketing automation investments are usually carried out by marketing departments (e.g. van Rijn 2018). Typical marketing budgets in B2B companies vary from 3 to 7 percent of annual revenue based on the company size and industry (e.g. Gerli 2014). According to a Pepper Global report from 2014, 63% of B2B companies typically allocate 10-29% of their marketing budget to marketing automation (van Rijn 2018), making marketing automation efforts a significant part of the total marketing budget of a company.

Tangible benefits from marketing automation investments cannot be generalized to every company, since companies, industries and the business targets for the use of marketing automation software can be different for each company. However, some remarks can be highlighted from the literature to formulate a suggestive understanding of the benefits and business potential of a marketing automation system. Increased lead volume that is one of the key objectives of marketing automation (e.g. Järvinen & Taiminen 2015, Richards 2017) should result in increased sales opportunities in the long run. According to Demand Gen (2014), 82% of B2B companies have achieved a 10-30% increase of sales opportunities through marketing automation activities. Leap (2013) also points out that properly nurtured leads result on average in a 20% increase of sales opportunities. According to Forrester Research report, companies that prosper in lead nurturing generate 50% more sales-qualified leads at 33% lower costs than other companies (Hoffmeister 2014), since nurturing activities can be automated.

As it was briefly mentioned above, one notable benefit of a marketing automation software is that it enables measuring the ROI of marketing activities (Kemper 2016). When a marketing automation software is in use, setting new monitorable and measurable KPIs for marketing is more straightforward. Following KPIs are suggested to measure the performance of marketing with help of marketing automation software based on theoretical findings:

- Lead volume
- Lead conversion
- Cost per lead
- Value of a lead
- Revenue generated

Multiple B2B companies have reportedly achieved notable benefits from marketing automation investments as the figures presented in this chapter pointed out. Not investing in sufficient toolset for lead management results in taking care of lead management efforts manually, which however is inefficient and require notable human resources (e.g. Järvinen & Taiminen 2015). Therefore, when a sufficient initial investment is made and the implementation programs are executed properly, the business potential of the new technologies and processes is substantial.

To conclude, when determining the tangible business potential of investing in the field of omnichannel customer experience and digital lead management, multiple points must be taken into consideration. Companies must acquire and adapt to certain digital competences, technologies and tools. The digital competences that were discussed in chapter 3.3 (e.g. analytics and other SMACIT capabilities, business knowledge, change-oriented mindset and other organizational competences) apply also to fields of digital lead management and omnichannel experience. The most significant tool that was highlighted in the literature is a marketing automation tool, which when implemented properly, can result in notable financial benefits for companies as lead management activities get more streamlined and data-driven.

However, merely acquiring the sufficient competences and tools is not enough, and therefore organizational and cultural consistency that is aligned with new digital capabilities is a mandatory prerequisite for succeeding in these fields. Companies need to renew their organizational structures and processes, form cross-functional teams with diverse skill-sets and adapt a digital mindset throughout the organization to make it possible to provide a superior omnichannel customer experience, enhance digital lead management capabilities and achieve tangible benefits from them.



## 5. CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH

This chapter presents the research methodology in more detail. First, description of data collection principles and methods are introduced. The second part of chapter 5 describes the data analysis methods that were applied in this study in addition considers the reliability of the study. The company that this thesis is conducted for (Valmet Technologies) is referred to as “target organization”.

### 5.1 Data collection

As it was mentioned in chapter 1, the research approach in this thesis is an abductive reasoning and the research strategy is a combination of an action research and a case study. As the main research question is “*How to enhance lead nurturing activities for creating an omnichannel customer experience in B2B context using digital technologies?*”, the chosen research strategy is suitable (e.g. Avison et al. 1999, Dubois & Gadde 2002, Saunders et al. 2009, pp. 145-146)

The empirical research of this thesis was conducted as qualitative interviews. Qualitative interviews enable understanding the reasons for the decisions that interviewees make and probe their answers (Saunders et al. 2009, pp. 324), which is beneficial in this study to gain a deep understanding of the research topics. Managers are more inclined to being interviewed than completing questionnaires in instances where the topic of the interview is interesting and relevant to their work (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 324), which also support the choice of qualitative interviews. The number of questions was also quite large and the nature of the questions were fairly open-ended, so qualitative interview is a lot more user-friendly for the research participants compared to e.g. a questionnaire in this instance (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 324-325).

The structure chosen for the interviews was a semi-structured interview as it is a non-standardized qualitative interview (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 320). In a semi-structured interview, known also as a theme interview, the themes of the research topics are known but precise forms and ordering of questions are open (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, p. 203), which allows enables gathering diverse information from many perspectives. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were seen as the most effective way to gain understanding of the current state as well as the desired target state of digital lead management and omnichannel customer experience efforts. Semi-structured interviews give freedom to the interviewees to answer the questions more thoroughly. Sampling method for determining the interviewees was purposive sampling, which allows the interviewer to use his/her own judgment to select the most suitable interviewees that enable answering to the research questions (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 237).

The objective of the interviews was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the current and desired target states of lead management and omnichannel experience activities to be able to develop relevant action recommendations for the target organization. Therefore, it was crucial to interview the most suitable internal stakeholders, which emphasizes the chosen purposive sampling method. The interviewees were chosen to be able to formulate a holistic view of the research topics. Majority of the interviews were individual, either face-to-face or online interviews and additionally two group interviews were also conducted. Group interview is an effective form of gathering information, because it enables gathering information from multiple people at once (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, p. 205, Saunders et al. 2009, p. 346). In this research, the interviewees that were organizationally located in different business lines as well as the two external participants were interviewed individually, whereas interviewees from the corporate functions (e.g. IT) were interviewed as a group.

The interviews were conducted during mid to late November and early December of 2017. During the study, 21 interviewees took part in total of 16 interviews. 12 of the interviews were individual interviews with employees of the target organization, 2 of the interviews were conducted as group interviews and remaining 2 of the interviews were individual interviews with external participants specializing in the field of digital customer experience. Each interviewee was approached with an e-mail with basic information about the thesis and its objectives as well as a simplified interviewee outline. As the anonymity of the interview answers was brought forward, all interviewees granted a permission to record the interviews. In addition to the recording, interviewer made supportive notes during the interview. After each interview they were cohesively analyzed, which made it possible to revisit the recordings to gather more detailed insights and identify systematics and patterns from the interviews for the further action recommendations.

The interview was divided to five main themes, which were:

1. Lead management
2. Customer relationship management and nurturing
3. Operational backbone
4. Digital maturity and channels
5. Digital competences

The main themes were based on the research questions and focus areas of the thesis. The interview outline is adapted to the five main themes and it is attached in Appendix A of the thesis. The interview outline was slightly customized for certain interviewees, such as the two external participants that did not have sufficient information about some of the intra-organizational topics. During each of the five themes, the interviewees were asked

for descriptions of current state as well as desired target state of the theme. Table 4 summarizes all key information about the interviews. All interviewees were numbered and are referenced based on that numbering further in the thesis.

**Table 4.** *Interview participants.*

#	Interviewee	Time (hours)	Date	Type
1	Participant 1	1	13.11.2017	online
2	Participant 2	1	13.11.2017	face-to-face
3	Participant 3	1	15.11.2017	online
4	Participant 4	1	15.11.2017	online
5	Participant 5	1	15.11.2017	online
6	Participant 6	1	17.11.2017	face-to-face
7	Participant 7	1	20.11.2017	online
8	Participant 8	0,75	20.11.2017	online
9	Participant 9	0,5	23.11.2017	face-to-face
10	Participant 10	1	24.11.2017	face-to-face
11	Participant 11	0,75	30.11.2017	online
12	Participant 12	1	4.12.2017	face-to-face
13	Group 1	1	17.11.2017	face-to-face
14	Group 2	1,5	24.11.2017	face-to-face
15	External participant 1	1	21.11.2017	online
16	External participant 2	1	08.12.2017	online

When considering reliability and validity of the interview results, semi-structured interviews can always have some data quality issues that may affect the reliability and validity of the results. Semi-structured interviews cannot be used for statistical generalization about the entire population. One reliability issue is that semi-structured interviews reflect the reality at the time they were collected and the environment can be subject to change

after the interview is conducted. Another reliability issue is related to the chosen sample of interviewees, as no customers of the target organization were interviewed as a part of the study. Data quality issues may also rise from the appropriateness of the location, since face-to-face interview compared to an online interview can affect the biases and emotions that the interviewee has during the interview and therefore alter the given answers. (Saunders et al. 2009, pp. 326-336) Slight majority of the interviews conducted were online interviews, which therefore may affect the reliability of the results. However, on a general level the answers to the interview questions were really similar regardless of the type of the interview and therefore the validity and reliability of results is considered suitable for this study.

## 5.2 Analysis methods

The interview results were not transcribed due to the number of interviews being fairly large as it would have been inappropriately time-consuming. However, the interview results were cohesively analyzed based on the recordings and notes made during the interviews after each interview. The interview results were analyzed using abductive approach and content analysis principles. Qualitative content analysis is a suitable method when analyzing text data (Hsieh & Shannon 2005) as it was the case in this thesis, after the interview results were written out. Content analysis aims to provide understanding and knowledge of the phenomenon that is being studied (Hsieh & Shannon 2005) and it aims to enhance the empirical findings by testing theoretical issues against it (Elo & Kyngäs 2007).

Content analysis in this thesis resembled inductive approach of qualitative content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs 2007). The analysis was carried out first by making self-memos (Saunders et al. p. 499), documenting the interview notes and grouping them by theme. Similar kind of answers were further grouped with each other and certain similarities and other repetitive patterns were looked for. Interview recordings were also listened and additional remarks were made based on them to help further analysis. Interim summaries (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 499) were also used when analyzing the results. Lastly, abstractions were made as general descriptions of the five main research topics were conducted.

The objective of the content analysis was to identify similarities among the interviews and judging from this perspective the objective was achieved. In general, the answers to the interview questions were mostly similar and answers from different interviewees contributed to each other's answers, which emphasizes the reliability of the research. Certain challenges and gaps were identified that were mentioned in practically every interview. These gaps as well as other empirical findings are brought forward in chapter 6.

## 6. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings from the empirical research that was conducted as a part of this thesis. The results from the qualitative interviews are divided into three parts that are based on the five main themes that were introduced in chapter 5. Citations from the actual interviews that aim to emphasize certain key points mentioned during the interviews are presented among the text.

### 6.1 Lead management

#### 6.1.1 Origin of leads

Interview results showed that majority of leads currently originate from conventional channels such as customer events and receiving offer requests via e-mail. The most frequent answers that came up in the interviews when asked about origin of leads are collected in table 5.

*Table 5. Origin of leads currently.*

Origin of leads
<b>Customer meetings</b>
<b>Customer events</b>
<b>Interactions on customer site</b>
<b>Offer requests from customers</b>

According to interview results, there is currently no systematic analyses conducted on any organizational level of how many leads are generated, identified or captured through each lead generation channel. However, it was widely recognized that currently lead generation is strongly based on traditional face-to-face discussions with customers at meetings, events or on site. Receiving complete offer requests from customers through e-mail, telephone or face-to-face was also ranked as one of the most common way to identify potential leads at the moment.

Vast majority of new leads originate from interactions with existing customers. Offline customer discussions occur e.g. on customer site, events, meetings, seminars and exhibitions. Overall, employees that operate in a direct contact with the customers, such as mill

sales managers, were identified as a crucial lead generation “channel” since part of their jobs is to generate new leads and turn them into actual sales. It was widely recognized in majority of the interviews that presence at the customer site is extremely important in lead generation, because new leads are often generated promptly when customers (also in some cases unexpectedly) face a problem in their processes. Being able to provide support in solving that problem as soon as possible is vital for retaining a positive customer relationship. Similarly, customers may present their business problems and needs at customer events as customers approach employees from the target organization with a specific case that they need help with. In these situations, it is important to be able to take care of the problem as quickly as possible or the lead may get lost.

Majority of current leads are customer-initiated. In addition to aforementioned offline channels, customer-initiated leads can also originate through online channels. Currently the most common online channel is e-mail in the form of an offer request for a certain product, spare part or other solution. The company website has a contact form, through which there has been a few contact requests from potential leads. The company website has also an automated chatbot partially in use that has been utilized for lead generation purposes to some extent. However, in a general level, leads are not systematically generated through digital channels at the moment and the lead volumes through contact form and chatbot are minimal.

According to interview results and literature, (Finnish) B2B companies in general are beginning to understand the potential of digital capabilities in the sales process and the potential of digital channels in lead generation. As number of other B2B companies, the target organization has also recognized the potential of digital channels for lead management in the future despite their marginal role in lead generation at the moment.

*Participant 3: “Digital channels could create a lot of new possibilities from sales perspective if the sales process could utilize all relevant online channels. Digital channels could be utilized in finding more customers with fewer resources.”*

*External participant 1: “B2B organizations have started to wake up to the potential of digital lead management and digital sales process. Especially marketing departments in the most mature companies have understood this and are in the forefront of developing these capabilities.”*

As it was mentioned in the introduction, there are many digital initiatives ongoing in the target organization. One of them is an enterprise-wide digital customer portal project and one of the key objectives for the customer portal is to bring the company closer to its customers and enhance customer relationships by providing personalized customer experiences. According to interview results the customer portal could be leveraged as a complementary channel for lead generation in the future among existing customers. Customer portal is more comprehensively discussed in chapter 6.2. Multiple interviewees also see

that the company website could be better utilized in lead generation but currently there are neither any defined lead management processes nor tools that would support it.

### 6.1.2 Lead management responsibilities

Lead management responsibilities are unclear at the moment. According to multiple interviewees, there are no specifically defined roles, responsibilities or actual measurable targets set for lead management. There also seems to be differences in lead management principles between business lines. Differing organization structures and cultures as well as somewhat differing characteristics of business (solution business vs. services and automation) were seen as the main causes of that.

Sales organizations within different business lines seem to have the main responsibility in overall lead management activities, according to interviewees. Some interviewees stated that sales people may have too big a role in lead management and a shared responsibility between marketing and sales could be more beneficial. Other central roles in lead management at the moment besides sales people are e.g. key account managers and other employees in area organizations, because area organizations have the main responsibility of customer relationships.

It was widely acknowledged in the interviews that site presence and daily customer service at customer site is important to capture new leads. Interview results showed that people that work in customer's sites should have increasing responsibility in lead generation. Therefore e.g. field service employees should have systematic targets for generating leads, which they do not at the moment.

*Participant 1: "Nobody is responsible for lead management. The responsibilities should be shared between marketing and sales from overall management perspective."*

*Participant 4: "Sales people have all the lead management responsibilities and they don't see the potential role that marketing could have in the process, for example in service business."*

*Participant 3: "Area organizations have the lead generation responsibility because they are also responsible for customer relationships."*

Based on interview results, there is currently a notable amount of unused potential from lead generation perspective because roles and responsibilities in this field are unclear. Even for roles that are central in current lead management activities, e.g. mill sales managers, there is currently no systematic information gathered about how many leads or the quality of leads that these employees have generated or acquired. This situation emphasizes the lack of systematic lead management processes and clear responsibilities in this field.

One notable point that stood out from the interview results, also stemming from the lack of defined processes and responsibilities, was that the role of marketing in lead generation is currently marginal. Marketing processes, roles and responsibilities are not adequately aligned with sales and lead management activities at the moment. Therefore, the resources and potential that marketing could bring to lead management activities are underutilized. The current roles and responsibilities of marketing as well as challenges that emerge from the lack of roles and responsibilities in lead management are discussed more thoroughly in chapter 6.1.4.

### **6.1.3 Lead and customer nurturing**

Lead nurturing is a fairly uncommon construct in the target organization at the moment. Lead nurturing is considered as either traditional customer relationship management or sales project management as most of leads originate among the existing customer base rather than come from completely new actors in the market. One interviewee stated that the closest activities related to lead nurturing are key account management activities as key account management aims to support customer's business by taking part in customer's annual planning, providing suggestions to customer needs and challenges and thus generate additional up-sales. There is a documented sales process for solution business (which is mainly product sales) that is aligned with customers' typical buying process and it serves as a common guideline for current lead management and nurturing type of activities.

The sales process is managed in CRM system. The sales process relies heavily on selling high value equipment to customers and therefore purchases are considered more as investments rather than operational buying or consumption. This in turn means that the current sales process is more reactive rather than proactive. The sales process also relies mainly on face-to-face interactions and other traditional ways of interacting with customers and no digital capabilities are utilized apart from CRM system for internal sales process management. Sales process for continuous business, such as services were considered too stiff and therefore many potential leads could be lost in the sales funnel. Lead nurturing from service perspective was also considered non-systematic.

Interviewees stated that customer behavior during sales or after sales is not necessarily monitored, however it is widely recognized that different customers value different things at different points of customer journeys. The target organization has segmented its customers by industry and by importance and there are customized customer plans for different customers in the post-purchase stage that are managed in CRM system. However, there are no systematic or data-driven customer care models specified for customers and current digital lead management capabilities and tools do not support creating these kinds of care models.



*Participant 10: “Currently there is a lot of unutilized service potential because of insufficient capabilities to look into customers’ motives and provide personalized content accordingly.”*

*Group 2: “There are a lot of “small things” that are not harmonized, optimized and automated, for example when we go to a customer’s site [data-driven care models] could have huge profit potential.”*

As it was discussed earlier, lead nurturing type of activities currently rely on face-to-face interactions and traditional ways of managing customers relationships. This however has yielded good results so far. However, all industries and companies, including the target organization, are undergoing a digital transformation and it was recognized among many interviewees that digital technologies could bring new opportunities to lead management in general. According to multiple interviews, customers may soon begin to demand more personalized experiences as new generations are employed because they are aware of the possibilities of digital technologies and have benchmarked service experiences from B2C sector in their everyday lives. Currently there are no sufficient digital capabilities built or processes defined to respond to these kinds of needs. Lead generation and overall lead management activities should be made more efficient using digital technologies and tools, according to interview results.

#### **6.1.4 Challenges in lead management**

This chapter summarizes the main challenges and most notable gaps related to lead management at the moment, based on interview results. Arguably the biggest challenge is related to processes, roles and responsibilities that are not adequately defined within the whole lead management context, especially from digital perspective. Currently there are no clear guidelines for digital lead management on strategic level. Also, key performance indicators and metrics are insufficient in this field. Lead management lacks clear process owners and a formalized end-to-end process of how different kind of leads should be managed throughout the customer journey.

Lead management at the moment is not systematic despite the structured sales process for solution business. Managing leads is solely connected to sales and key account management as they seem to have the full responsibility over lead management. The pre-sales or awareness phase of the customer journey cannot be managed properly at the moment. Marketing has practically no business targets or roles in lead generation, lead nurturing or other lead management activities. Lack of clear processes also results in excess manual work when taking care of lead nurturing activities manually.

*Group 2: “There is no conceptual end-to-end lead management process which is causing inefficiencies at the moment.”*

*Participant 6: “Current lead management models do not work that well. Culture that would bolster it is missing.”*

Based on interview results, systematic documentation and forwarding of leads is currently somewhat unstable since it is manual and the whole new lead management process could rely on a single person sharing potential lead information forward. Therefore, at the moment there is a risk of potential lead information never getting shared and a potential sales opportunity getting lost. Digital channels are not harnessed in lead management systematically. Currently there are no ways to identify, qualify or nurture new digital suspects, prospects or leads. There are no capabilities to enable targeted marketing for new leads. There are no sufficient processes or tools for effectively managing leads that come through digital channels, such as e-mail queries, website and social media services.

In addition to the lack of formal processes, there is also a lack of clarified roles and responsibilities in lead management, as discussed in chapter 6.1.1. Sales has the overall responsibility of lead management activities and together with key account management they are responsible for lead nurturing and customer relationship management. Marketing has no roles in digital lead management although, the best practices in managing the awareness phase of the customer journey suggested that marketers should have the responsibility for it as it was discussed in chapter 4 (see e.g. Järvinen & Taiminen 2015). Also, people who work in customer interface are in a prime position of generating new leads among existing customers, but currently there are no incentives or KPIs that would support doing it. All in all, there are no dedicated people in charge of managing the whole end-to-end journey and there are no adequate metrics or KPIs set around lead management (lead generation, qualification, forwarding and nurturing) that would support more effective management of leads.

*Participant 4: “Marketing has no visibility to leads and do not manage them because there are no processes or systems to nurture them and forward them to sales people.”*

Many of the challenges above are related to insufficient digital tools that are in use in the company at the moment. Thus, many interviewees stated that lack of sufficient lead management tools are the biggest challenge at the moment in addition to the missing lead management process discussed above. A number of interviewees stated that the awareness phase of the customer journey is overall a very notable gap in lead management.

*Participant 10: “It would be valuable to capture touchpoints in the awareness phase and understand the journey that customer tried to follow. Currently there is a clear gap.”*

*Participant 6: “Main challenge in this field is the lack of marketing automation tool and processes.”*

Touchpoints in this case are e.g. interactions at customer events and company website. Mapping out customers' actions from the beginning of their customer journey would enable learning customers' motives and behavior which in turn would enable more effective nurturing of leads. Marketing automation capabilities could enable tracking customers' actions throughout their customer journeys.

Digital visitors can be identified only when they provide information via contact form on the website or make contact independently e.g. sending an e-mail to request additional information on certain matter. There is currently no visibility to the customer's actual digital journey and no way to trace customers on different digital channels with the exception of e-mail campaigns that can be monitored to some extent. Marketing employees recognized the need for having tools for gaining insight and intelligence about leads and then passing on relevant information to sales people. This is a common feature of marketing automation activities, where marketing would gather knowledge about the leads and nurture them up until the point that they are mature enough to be considered as sales-qualified leads or sales opportunities (e.g. Järvinen & Taiminen 2015). Overall, there are no systematic tools (e.g. marketing automation software) for qualifying leads. Current lead management capabilities consist of only few web analytics tools that are not utilized to their full potential as well as CRM system, which has its own constraints in managing leads effectively. Also, there are currently no proper ways to gain a 360-view of customers that e.g. Melero et al. (2016) introduced, which is a big gap in lead management as well as omnichannel experience.

Lack of resources was identified as one of the main challenges in developing lead management processes and acquiring relevant digital tools for it. Current lead generation model is heavily based on face-to-face interactions during customer visits or equivalent meetings. However, there are not enough sales people to visit factories which means that potential leads can be missed easily. This is where digital channels, when utilized properly, could enable more (cost-)efficient generation and capturing of leads with fewer resources compared to current management model, among both existing and new customers.

Lack of sufficient resource allocations reflects also in lack of lead management tool (marketing automation) investments, which is normal in digitally maturing companies, according to Ahlemann (2016) and Kane et al. (2016). As it was discussed earlier, there are currently few web analytics tools in use but no sufficient resources or knowhow to make valid reports for decision making based on that data. Scarce resources have also actualized in a situation where developing lead management related activities have become secondary beside employees' "actual" job descriptions. Therefore, to succeed in developing lead management activities, there either should be full time employees whose main responsibility is to take care of lead management or adjust current KPIs in a way that would enhance developing lead management activities beside employees' day jobs.

Technological challenges were also identified. State of current technology backbone is decent, but there are some gaps and challenges in information architecture from lead management perspective. According to interviews, state of master data is decent, but not optimal. Current information systems and platforms have all the capabilities to enable efficient lead management and enhance customer experience, but lack of strategic management in the past has resulted in detached information systems that do not support lead management activities sufficiently at the moment. State of digital maturity is considered to be improving and currently at a decent level compared to closest competitors and other Finnish heavy industry companies, which brings confidence in succeeding in digital business initiatives in the future.

*Group 2: “There are technological challenges. History is a weight that has to be dragged with to the future because systems have been built separately and they don’t fit together. However, it would be technologically possible to fit all the systems together but it has not yet been prioritized yet.”*

*Group 1: “Digitalizing business is a must because we can’t stay still. Current maturity is at an okay level compared to other heavy industry companies.”*

As mentioned earlier, there are currently no proper tools or system integrations that would enable formulating a complete 360-view of customers (e.g. customer’s order history, maintenance history and given feedback) in the target organization. Currently it is hard to utilize the so called “installed base” data and the quality of customer data in general varies a lot. Therefore, customer data is not utilized to its full potential – e.g. maintenance information is not utilized in marketing efforts or other lead generation activities. However, some interviewees saw technologies as an opportunity rather than a constraint, because the in-house technological platforms (such as Salesforce, Amazon Web Services and Microsoft Azure) are capable of developing the required digital capabilities for creating omnichannel experience and harnessing digital channels and tools in lead management.

## 6.2 Digital channels

Interview results showed that currently digital channels are not significant from lead management or customer experience point of view. According to many interviews, in current situation there is not a sufficient channel strategy, digital channels have no KPIs set for lead generation related activities and there are no systematic targets for providing digital customer experience. However, the importance of digital channels in the future was widely recognized because customer expectations toward digital channels and making business across them are rising.

A few interviewees stated that utilizing digital channels is necessary because new generations are used to gathering information from different online channels before making

purchase decisions, which means that it is important to build these capabilities to stay competitive also in the future. Despite not having a role in conventional business at the moment, there is still a wide range of digital channels in use. Those digital channels that were recognized as having business potential in the future are presented in table 6.

**Table 6.** *Digital channels with greatest business potential.*

Digital channel
<b>Customer portal</b>
<b>Website</b>
<b>Industrial internet platform</b>
<b>eServices (online store)</b>
<b>Social media: LinkedIn, YouTube, Twitter</b>

Customer portal was identified as the most potential digital channel for generating leads, nurturing customer relationships and engaging customers. However, the customer portal can be leveraged only for existing customers. Chapter 6.2.1 discusses customer portal more thoroughly. Website was the most recognized digital channel among interviewees; however, currently it is not harnessed directly in generating new business or leads. Website is also the most central lead generation channel for totally new leads and customers. Website, as well as social media channels are important from marketing point of view. LinkedIn, YouTube and Twitter were identified as most the customer-centric social media channels. Other social media channels in use are Facebook and Instagram, but they focus more on brand building, investor relations and recruiting as does the website.

Industrial internet platform was identified as a potential channel for generating new business in the future. The industrial internet platform is being developed at the moment and it is currently not harnessed in business to full extent, however its potential in lead generation and enabling omnichannel experience in the future was considered significant during the interviews. Industrial internet platform brings the connectivity component to products that e.g. Porter & Heppelmann (2015) introduced and therefore can be leveraged in creating a seamless customer experience throughout the customer journey. Employees that were identified as being closely connected to the industrial internet platform are performance center operators. Performance center is an organizational function that was recently implemented in every business line to provide remote services to customers. Therefore, when industrial internet platform and performance centers are properly implemented, performance centers were conjectured as having a crucial role in lead generation

and qualification activities as installed base constantly generates performance and other product usage data to be analysed and leveraged for business.

eServices, which is an online store for spare parts and consumables was identified as a more cost-efficient way of selling these parts to customers in the future and therefore a relevant digital channel from business perspective. Currently eServices acts more as a channel for customer requests and sending queries and it is not generally in use for customers' purchases, but it is one of the digital initiatives that are ongoing within the organization. However, in the future it is expected to be a useful channel in the future for ordering spare parts effortlessly and thus enabling a seamless customer experience.

### 6.2.1 Customer portal

One major digital initiative that is currently ongoing within the organization is an enterprise-wide development project around a digital customer portal that is being built for improving customer interactions, customer relationship management and customer experience in general. Majority of the interviewees see the upcoming portal as the most important or a central interaction channel that could be leveraged for lead generation and lead nurturing as well as creating an omnichannel experience, e.g. by providing personalized, relevant and valuable content to different customer personas. According to interviewees, the main goal of customer portal is to improve customer experience.

*Participant 5: Customer portal has an important role. The objective of the portal is to improve digital customer experience by providing tailored content and access to all digital services and applications based on customer needs"*

Majority of the interviewees stated that because of digitalization, the future leans more towards interacting with customers through portals and performance centers, that were introduced earlier. Customers will be segmented by company and job role on the portal and based on these segmentations, the portal users will have a real-time view to personalized content that is relevant to them. The customer portal is a major leap towards more social selling as it enables building customer communities that can be leveraged in selling and promoting solutions among customers, not only by means of employees of the target organization. Customer portal also enables gathering a lot of relevant data and insight from customers to personalize and improve their experiences further.

*External participant 1: "The biggest potential of a customer portal lies in the community and social selling. However, building communities requires changes in internal activities and culture as well as a consolidated insight within the whole company so everyone has to be on board to make it work."*

*External participant 2: “The importance of measuring digital content cannot be overexaggerated. Every action during lead management process should be data driven.”*

However, at the moment customer portal is still in a developing phase and a lot of these capabilities and features mentioned above are only in conceptual phases or wishes of what the portal could be capable of doing. The lead management and actual omnichannel experience perspectives are still out of the main scope of the portal development at the moment but in the future it would be only logical to steer the portal towards that direction to improve both lead management and customer experience together with other digital initiatives.

### **6.2.2 State of omnichannel experience**

Omnichannel experience and management were fairly known constructs among interviewees despite the lack of omnichannel management related roles or omnichannel experience related activities within the company at the moment. Currently channel management is divided between different organizational units and channels are not aligned with each other and overall the approach towards channel management resembles more multichannel than omnichannel, which is usual in low and moderate maturity companies, as it was discussed in chapter 4 (see e.g. Hoogveld & Koster 2016, Kane et al. 2016, Ross et al. 2016). Interviewees stated that aiming towards omnichannel capabilities should be the target state for channel strategy and customer experience strategy:

*Participant 12: “Life of customer, acquiring knowledge and communication should be made really easy for customers. Channels should support customer’s business and therefore omnichannel experience should be the objective.”*

As discussed in earlier chapters, there are currently no processes, care models nor systematic plans for utilizing customer data to provide a seamless customer experience and generate, qualify and nurture new leads. According to interview results it can be argued that the company lacks a data-driven culture that would support the shift towards omnichannel activities. There are no technological capabilities to monitor, measure, analyze and develop current touchpoints systematically towards better digital customer experience which relates to challenges in technological backbone, such as insufficient strategic guidelines and information system integrations as well as fragmented information architecture.

Personalization, which is a key element of omnichannel experience, is marginal in current nurturing and customer relationship management activities. Personalization was identified as one crucial gap in current marketing activities. According to interview results, currently no personalized content is targeted to customers via website or other digital channels. There is no way to personalize and promote content automatically based on

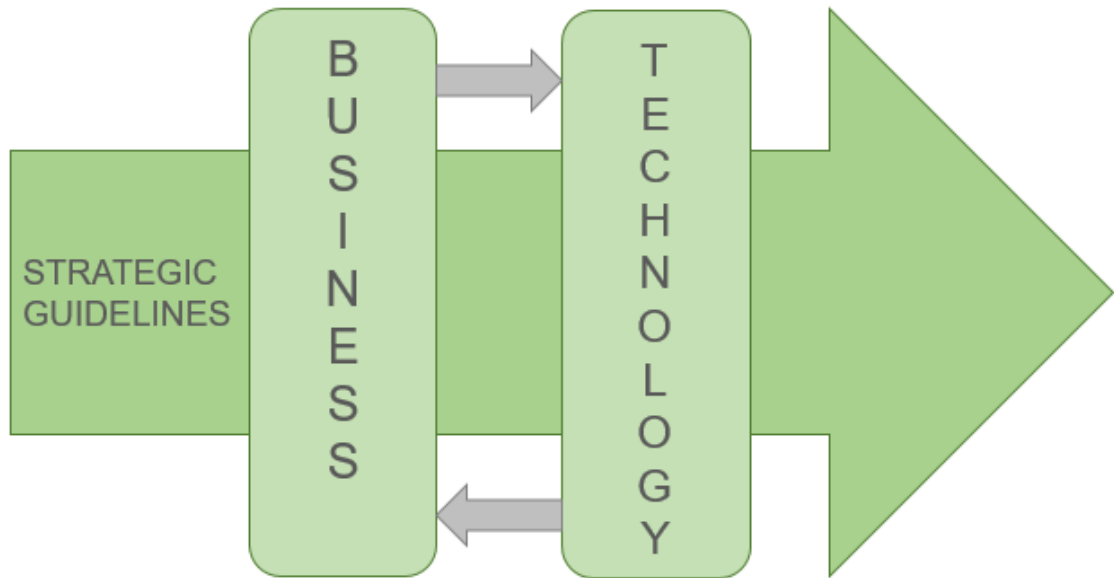
customer data. Personalization is seen mainly as a tool (marketing automation) related challenge, however relevant lead management and marketing processes need to be defined and implemented before any tangible benefits can be achieved through potential marketing automation software investments.

The upcoming customer portal that was discussed earlier was suggested as one crucial channel from omnichannel experience perspective and the main channel to provide personalized content to customers. The objective of customer portal is to make the user feel that the user interface and view is personalized for the user and he or she sees the most relevant content related to his or her daily work activities. Based on interview results, another central channel for creating an omnichannel experience environment could be the industrial internet platform, because it brings the connectivity component to the installed base and therefore enables a constant access to data that can be leveraged for gaining a valid 360-view of the customer. To conclude, customer portal together with the industrial internet platform could be able to connect physical (installed base) and digital customer experiences to enable seamless experience and omnipresence on customer site, which customers value highly, according to interview results.

### **6.3 Organizational background**

Previous chapters have discussed lead management customer experience related challenges mainly from process, responsibility, technology and tool perspectives. However, as it was stated in chapter 3.4, the most important requirements for a successful organizational change are not technological but rather the employees and organizational culture. Relevant business and technology competences among employees were identified as the most essential for achieving desired digital customer experience and lead management targets. Figure 13 demonstrates the relation between these competences when moving towards digital customer experience capabilities.





**Figure 13.** Required competences for implementing digital customer experience principles.

Business skills were seen as the most important and they are a must-have in order to benefit from digital initiatives and internal development projects.

*Participant 12: “Business skills are the most important skills to know what to develop from information technology perspective”.*

*Participant 10: “Business competences are needed to develop tool portfolio and understand customers”*

Business skills include general skills such as finance, communication and decision making as well as more specific knowledge such as understanding of customer’s business processes and needs as well as understanding internal business processes and ways of operating. Change management and leadership were also highlighted as crucial business skills when shifting towards digital ways of operating that are new to many and may therefore result in resistance to change. Leadership is required to orchestrate the necessary changes. Also, certain important characteristics that relate to business skills were identified throughout multiple interviews, that were an analytical mindset as well as a data-driven mindset.

*Participant 11: “Change management is important in that sense that new digital services ways of working can be intimidating for employees and customers and therefore they need support when transitioning to this world.”*

The most crucial technology skills that were mentioned were related to either different technologies, such as internet of things, artificial intelligence, mobile and analytics or

different digital tools, such as marketing automation software, analytics software and content creation and management. Advanced analytics was identified as the most needed technological skill throughout the organization. Other relevant technology skills that were mentioned were information security, user experience design, data management and data visualization skills.

However, before any of these skills can be utilized for developing digital customer experience capabilities, there needs to be sufficient strategic guidelines and high-level vision to follow (see figure 13). It was recognized that currently the “big picture” is missing from strategic perspective. In order to succeed in filling the gaps that were identified during this research, the importance of omnichannel management needs to be acknowledged on the enterprise level to be able to allocate sufficient resources for it.

*Group 2: “Big picture is missing.”*

*Participant 10: “No big picture around this field is seen in high enough [in the organization].”*

*Participant 2: “People that see the big picture around this are needed.”*

Technology skills were not seen as a bottle-neck or a significant problem although there were some gaps in current skill sets. Majority of interviewees stated that in general there are sufficient technology competences but they are currently allocated elsewhere and not in omnichannel management context. The most notable skill gaps were related to data analytics as well as software related skills. Especially marketing employees stated that advanced analytics is a highly desired skill combined with sufficient marketing automation capabilities to succeed in providing an omnichannel customer experience.

The importance of change management and leadership cannot be exaggerated, because the shift towards digital way of operating is imminent and it involves many changes in current ways of working. According to interview results, the shift towards data-driven has already begun to emerge and there are already different digital initiatives (such as the customer portal) ongoing within the company. The interviewees were confident that the organization has the sufficient digital change management abilities and it is just a matter of allocating resources towards that change.

On the other hand, the organization was seen as quite stagnant and not that flexible for renewal and interviewees considered it a challenge to change accustomed ways of working. Especially people that work in customer interface have a crucial role in adopting digital capabilities and promoting new digital solutions to customers and changing their accustomed ways of working can be challenging.

To fully utilize digital capabilities across the whole organization, multiple interviewees identified a need for cross-functional teams in business development initiatives. Practically, it would mean that IT should be involved when developing new solutions together with business people. All interviewees stated that IT should have a role in value creation.

*Participant 4: “Cross-functional teams of IT and business people are necessary. Marketing needs IT-oriented people.”*

*External participant 1: “IT, marketing and sales should be put together because usually they are diverged and work in their own silos. IT should bring architect roles to business development projects.”*

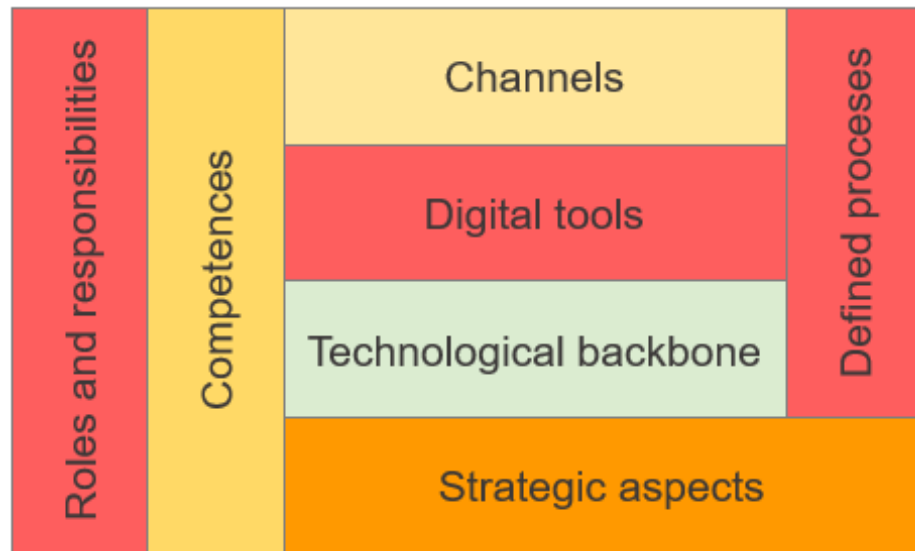
*Group 1: “Role of IT is to create value for customer through IT services and bringing external insight to business people.”*

The main responsibilities of IT should be identifying new business possibilities, providing opportunities for business and collaborate with them to implement new solutions and develop business processes. It is important that development initiatives are business-driven but IT should always be present and ensure compatibility and consistency from technology perspective. Therefore, it is crucial that apart from information technology skills, IT employees must have sufficient business skills, such as understanding of both customer’s processes and business models as well as collaboration and communication skills to be able to co-create value-adding solutions internally and externally.

## 6.4 Summary of current state

Notable gaps and defects related to current lead management activities, especially from digital perspective, and ability to provide an omnichannel customer experience were identified during the research. As it was thoroughly discussed throughout chapter 6, the most crucial gaps and were related to missing processes, unclear roles and responsibilities and insufficient tools for managing leads and creating a seamless omnichannel experience.

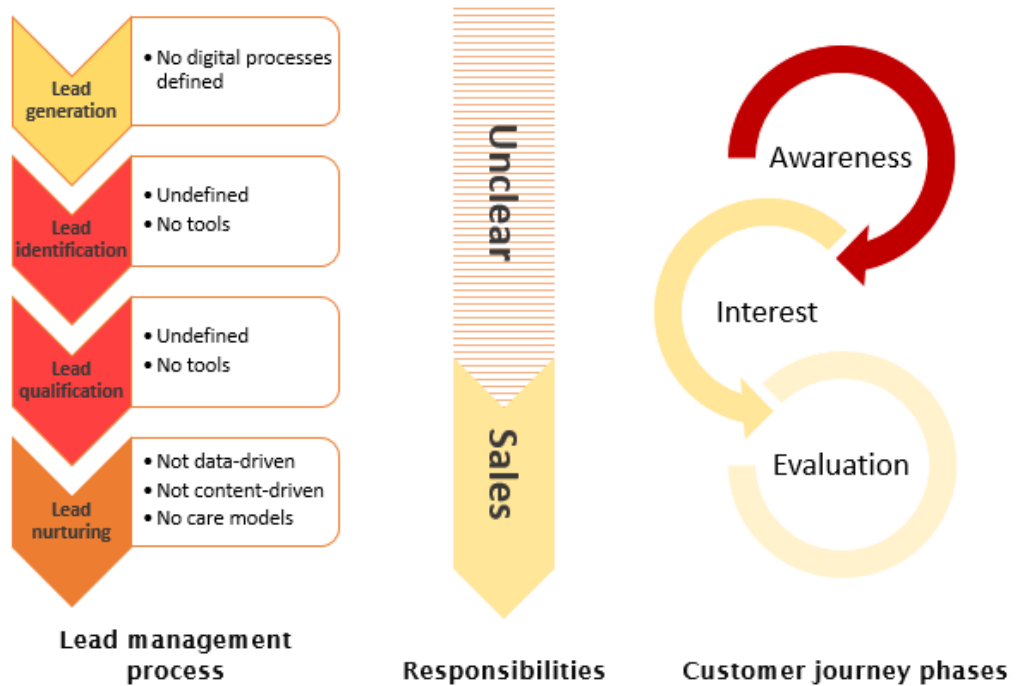
Figure 14 summarizes all the defects that were identified. Figure 14 is derived from digital customer experience prerequisites illustration (figure 8) that was presented in chapter 3.4. Figure 14 is interpreted the same way as figure 8, which means that the bottom layer of the structure, in this case strategic aspects, need to be addressed first before moving onto further layers. Vertical layers indicate that these layers relate to each horizontal layer that they reach vertically. That said, roles and responsibilities as well as competences need to be addressed alongside with strategic aspects in the beginning, as it shows in figure 14. These two layers encompass the whole structure, which means that they are related to all layers. Similarly, processes are related to the backbone, digital tools and channels as well as the two other vertical layers, roles and responsibilities as well as competences.



**Figure 14.** Gaps related to fields of omnichannel experience and digital lead management.

The colour of the layer indicates its current maturity level. As it can be seen in figure 14 the maturities of roles and responsibilities, processes and tools were seen as the most critical areas and therefore they require the biggest changes and efforts compared to current states. The second most unstable area is the insufficient strategic viewpoints related to lead management and omnichannel experience. Competences were seen as the third biggest gap related to aforementioned fields. Although some competences were seen insufficient, there were a fair amount of technological and business-related competences identified that are already in-house.

Amount of interaction channels and presence in generic digital channels such as website and social media is at a decent level. However, a clear channel strategy and sufficient management are still lacking and therefore changes in current ways of operating are required. Technological backbone in general has the general readiness of enabling all different technological requirements for efficient digital lead management and omnichannel experience. The platforms that are in use are adequate, current digital tools on top of the platform are still insufficient. For example, there is already a Salesforce platform in use, but there are no marketing automation or other lead management solutions yet acquired. Figure 15 depicts the current state in a customer journey format, which brings an interesting contrast of the current state when comparing to figure 14.



**Figure 15.** *Current state in a customer journey context.*

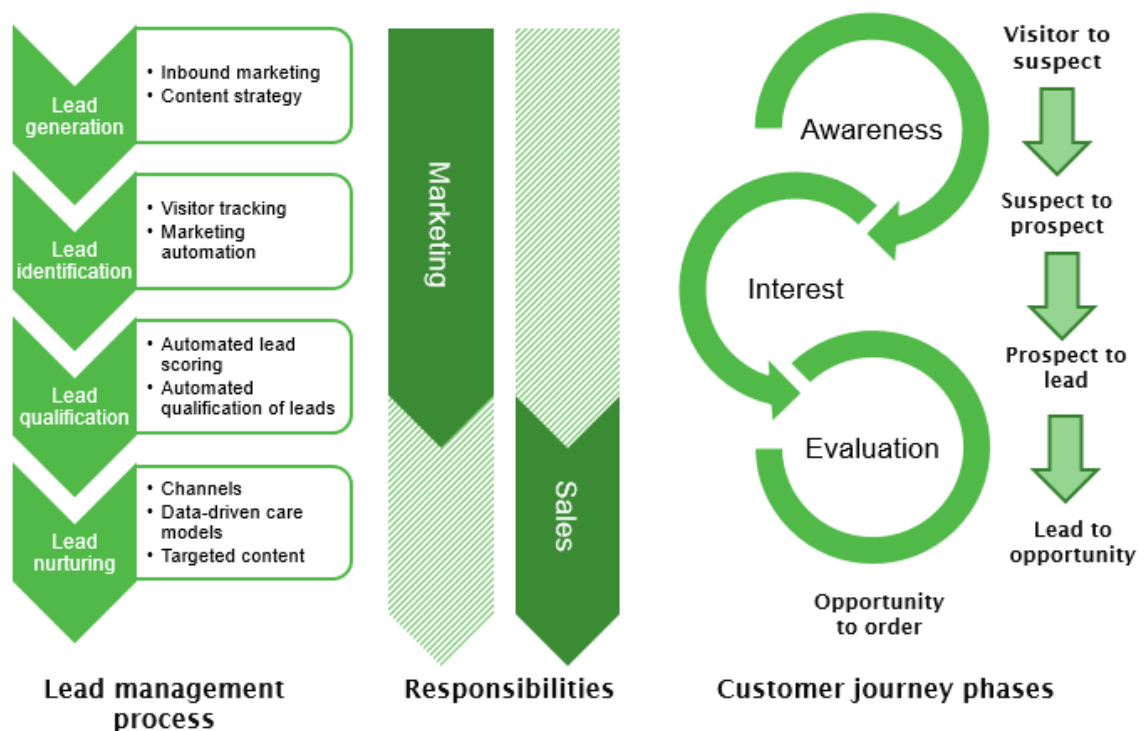
Figure 15 supports the conclusions from figure 14, which indicated that currently the lead management activities are not properly defined or managed. The awareness phase of the customer journey is invisible (colored dark red in figure 15) and other pre-purchase phases of the journey are also not properly managed, e.g. due to unclear roles, lack of sufficient tools and business targets. Sales have the full responsibility of management activities and sales process during the customer journeys, however the responsibilities in the awareness and interest phases of the journey are unclear.

## 7. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

This chapter introduces action recommendations based on the findings from both the theoretical and empirical research. The action recommendations are twofold. First, a visualization of the desired target state compared to the current state presented in chapter 6. The second part of the action recommendations is a comprehensive action plan proposal for achieving that target state.

### 7.1 Desired target state

Figure 14 and figure 15 visualized the main challenge areas regarding lead management and omnichannel experience. Based on the identified challenge areas, figure 16 depicts the desired target state, where these challenges are clarified. The desired target state is composed based on interview results and theoretical findings. In the desired state, lead management activities are systematically in a documented process format, there are clear responsibilities set for lead management, touchpoints within every interaction channel are properly connected with each other and channels are managed uniformly to create an omnichannel customer experience.



*Figure 16. Desired future target state of managing the beginning of a customer journey.*

Figure 16 presents the proposed lead management process and division of responsibilities in a customer journey context. Customer journey phases (awareness, interest and evaluation) on the right-hand side of figure 16 represent the first phases of a customer's buying process and touchpoints across the journey, whereas lead management process represents the internal equivalent to the beginning of customer's journey as it aims to adapt to customer's buying behaviour at each step and enable ease of doing business.

As it was stated multiple times in chapter 6, current lead management activities do not utilize digital capabilities and overall the lead management principles, targets and guidelines are not properly defined. Currently, lack of digital capabilities is most notably realized in an invisibility to the awareness phase of the customer journey. In the target state, there will be visibility to each phase of the customer journey due to proper lead management toolset, proper system integrations to enable combining all customer data together to be harnessed in generating new business as well as sufficient digital competences to manage the entire digital environment. Digital lead management processes as well as roles and responsibilities will also be sufficiently defined and developed further to improve quality of leads and customer experience. In the target state the ultimate goal is to gain a 360-view of the customer as well as generating more and higher quality leads with fewer resources due to digitalized processes and sufficient toolset.

Internal process equivalents to the awareness phase of the customer journey are lead generation and lead identification. Since there are currently no systematic ways of generating leads digitally, no targets for lead generation and no way to identify or track suspects, there should be a proper tool implemented in the desired target state that enables identifying and tracking suspects and their behaviour. The most important tool for managing the awareness phase of the customer journey is a marketing automation tool with relevant lead identification capabilities. Defining the entire lead management process is more thoroughly discussed in chapter 7.2.

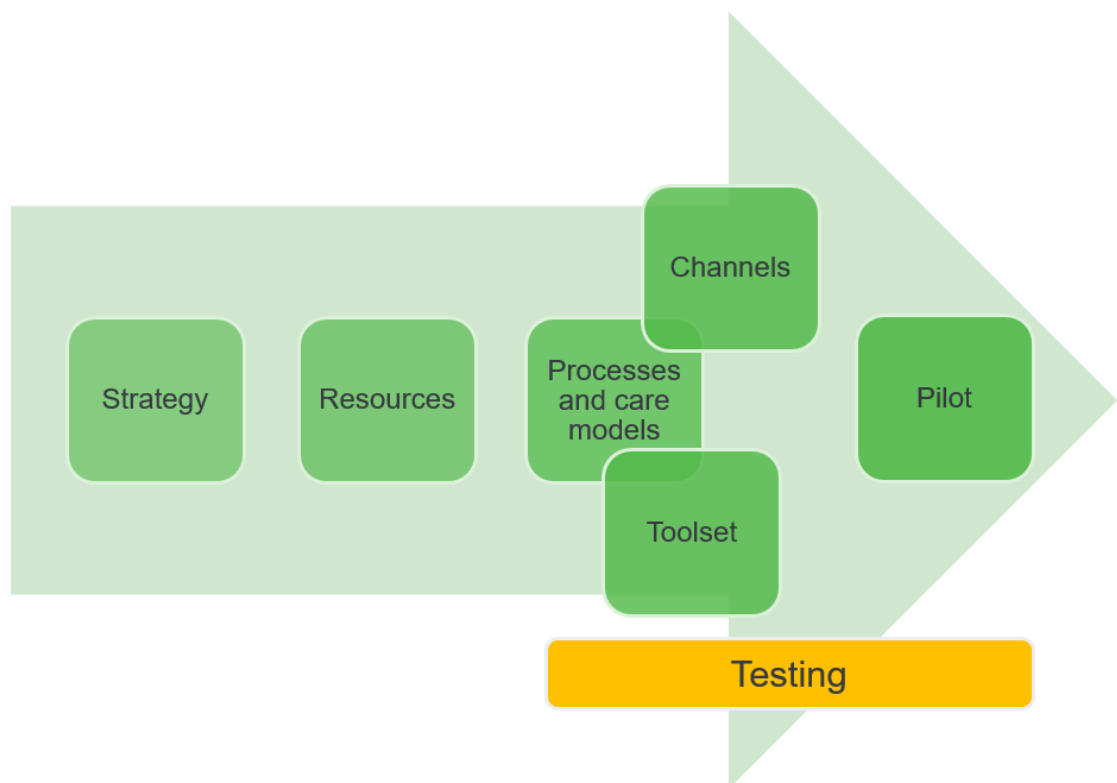
Responsibilities should be clearly defined in the target state as opposed to current situation where formal lead management responsibilities are unclear, especially from digital point of view. As discussed in chapter 6, sales departments across all business lines have currently the overall responsibility of practically every lead management activity whereas marketing resources are notably underutilized in lead management. Therefore, the action recommendation for responsibilities as figure 16 shows is that marketing and sales should have a shared responsibility over the entirety of pre-purchase stage of the customer journey.

Findings from the theoretical part of the study (see chapter 4) backs up the proposal in figure 16 as in literature it was widely recommended that marketing should be responsible of the first phases (awareness, interest) of the customer journey before shifting the main lead management responsibility over to sales. One main objective in the desired target state proposal that does not stand out too clearly in figure 16, because it is more associated

with existing customers rather than new suspects, is to create an omnichannel experience environment through relevant online and offline channels. When processes, roles and tools for lead management and digital customer experience are determined, proper business targets for channels can be set and channels can be developed as well as personalized based on customer preferences. Proper management of processes, tools, roles and channels assure that customer experience stays seamless throughout each channel for all customers.

## 7.2 Action plan

Figure 16 in chapter 7.1 introduced a solution proposal for the desired target state of lead management processes and omnichannel customer experience that aims to fill the gaps and challenges that were identified in figures 14 and 15. This chapter focuses on the action plan of the actual steps that need to be taken in order to achieve the desired state (figure 16). The action plan is formulated based on both empirical and theoretical findings. Figure 17 presents the phased action plan to be followed.



**Figure 17.** Proposed action plan for in form of a business line wide development initiative.

The first suggestion is to establish a development initiative in the target organization on a business line level in a chosen business unit to execute the action plan. The action plan



proposal itself is divided to six phases. The action plan is composed based on literature and empirical findings of the current state. The first phase is formulating a strategy and a vision around the focal areas in the development initiative, e.g. creating a 360-view of the customer and improving the lead volume and quality using digital capabilities. The second phase is to determine and allocate resources that orchestrate and drive the development in order to achieve the business targets and vision that were set in strategy phase. After clarifying the strategic objectives and determining resources, the third phase of the action plan is focused on developing the actual processes and customer care models that are applied to achieve the business targets.

Phases four and five are overlapping with phase three because both the toolset and the channel portfolio are strongly related to lead management processes, customer care models and creating the omnichannel experience. At least some functionality and features of the toolset are needed in phase three to map, test and validate the processes and care models as they are under development. Channels are also linked to processes and care models as channels are the interfaces towards customers through which the care models are executed. In the target state, channels have an important role also in lead generation and other lead management activities. Seamless integration of channels also creates the omnichannel experience for customers during their customer journeys. The sixth and last phase in this action plan proposal is the implementation of a pilot in a chosen business unit and as the pilot succeeds, the new lead management and omnichannel experience targets should be extended to other business units and business lines as well.

### **7.2.1 Strategy and business potential**

Strategy around lead management and omnichannel experience should stem from digital strategy that focuses on customer engagement (see chapter 3.4) as a customer engagement strategy focuses on creating customer loyalty, trust and passion by providing consistent and personalized customer experiences. In this case it is hypothesized that a customer engagement type of digital strategy is already in place as this thesis does not take a stand in implementing a digital strategy itself.

The vision of the entire development initiative should be to gain an authentic 360-view of its key customers, build stronger customer relationships and improve lead management activities using digital technologies. The target company's vision is to become the global champion in serving its customers and therefore gaining a data-driven 360-view is directly aligned with current corporate vision. One of the most crucial decisions during strategy phase is to choose the "internal target organization", such as a single business unit in which this development initiative will be piloted in the end. This internal pilot organization should be determined in a way that allows achieving results fast, in which case certain service business unit whose offering consists of many similar products and a vast customer base is suggested for the pilot.

During the strategy phase, it is important to define key stakeholders around the development initiative both internally and externally. As the development initiative is suggested to be executed on business line level, main internal stakeholders within each business line are the marketing and sales departments. On the corporate level, the main internal stakeholder is IT department as IT should be responsible e.g. for setting up the technologies, implementing the chosen toolset, and coordinating relevant training sessions to key users. IT also need to constantly collaborate with business stakeholders to ensure the integrity of the technological solutions from business perspective and keep the technologies up to date. On a corporate level, external communication is also a valid internal stakeholder, as it is responsible for managing the website and various social media channels.

Main external stakeholders are a technology partner and a “way of working” consultant that assists in implementing the new, digital-oriented ways of working when digitalizing the lead management process. External help may also be needed for setting up the technologies and tools with IT department. The consultant partner could also provide assistance in managing and developing the new digital lead management processes.

Determining the internal stakeholders requires allocating a specific part of their annual budgets to the development initiative. The budget must cover the costs of internal resources (man-hours), the costs of the external stakeholders as well as initial technology investments. The time frame of the development initiative should also be defined, when fixing the budget for the different phases of the development initiative. Based on empirical findings, it is suggested that the phases from strategy to implementing the toolset should take maximum a year and maximum of another year should be allocated for managing the pilot before scaling the initiative to other business lines and departments given that the results of the pilot are sufficient.

The biggest business potential of this development initiative is the possibility to improve upselling and cross-selling among existing customers. Therefore, there should be a clear numerical business target set for the development initiative, e.g. “10% increase in sales opportunities from digital channels in business unit/line X.” In general, the new processes and technologies can be leveraged to generate new and higher quality leads in a systematic way across the most important digital channels. Improvement of lead volume can be achieved with fewer resources as one of the objectives of this development initiative is to automate certain parts of the lead management process. Thus, managing the process would require less human resources. There is also business potential in generating new suspects with the new technological capabilities and processes.

To be able to monitor the business potential and achieved results, it is crucial to set relevant KPIs of what to track, measure and analyze. Generating more leads (increasing lead volume) itself is a valid business target and it is suggested to be the one of the main KPIs when measuring the lead management performance during and after the pilot. As one of the objectives is to improve the quality of leads so that they are more likely to convert

into sales opportunities, lead conversion rate should also be a crucial KPI. Conversions should be measured at all phases of the customer journey, which are:

- visitor to suspect
- suspect to prospect
- prospect to lead
- lead to sales opportunity
- sales opportunity to order.

KPIs should be set on each of the most important channels. Other valuable related KPIs in lead management for the target organization, reflecting to chapter 4.8 and empirical findings, are cost per lead and value of an average lead. KPIs should always be determined for measuring the pilot effectiveness from content perspective, e.g. hits per content to compare what type of content customers consumed the most during their purchase journeys.

### 7.2.2 Resources

Second phase in the action plan is the resources phase where roles and responsibilities are determined among the stakeholders that were identified during strategy phase. Based on interview results it is suggested that there are full-time employees assigned to the development initiative team that are fully dedicated to the development initiative and have their personal KPIs set accordingly. Data-driven mindset among the employees is crucial because every decision when developing the processes and care models later on should be data-driven. Cross-functionality in the development initiative team is a must.

Some B2B organizations have approached the resourcing situation by setting up a dedicated department that focuses on customer insight. Customer insight department is responsible for gathering customer insight, such as customer and industry data as well as enhancing customer relationships by improving customer experience based on analysing and leveraging that data. Similar suggestion is also proposed for the target organization, as the development initiative team could form a customer insight department for the chosen business line.

Core competences within the customer insight team are marketing, sales, content creation and management, IT, data engineering, data and business analytics as well as user experience design. As figure 14 indicated, current competence levels are at a decent level but not sufficient enough. New marketing related competences that the customer insight team should possess are e.g. digital lead generation, marketing technologies, digital marketing and targeted marketing. Marketing, as well as sales people should also have sufficient skills in analytics and data visualization to be able to draw value and insight from the data when developing processes. Other new competences for sales people are e.g. digital and social selling to be able to engage with customers in new, digital ways and capture new

deals. Sales people also have a big role in promoting digital sales channels and other digital solutions to customers, which is why data-driven mindset is crucial for all employees that work in the customer interface.

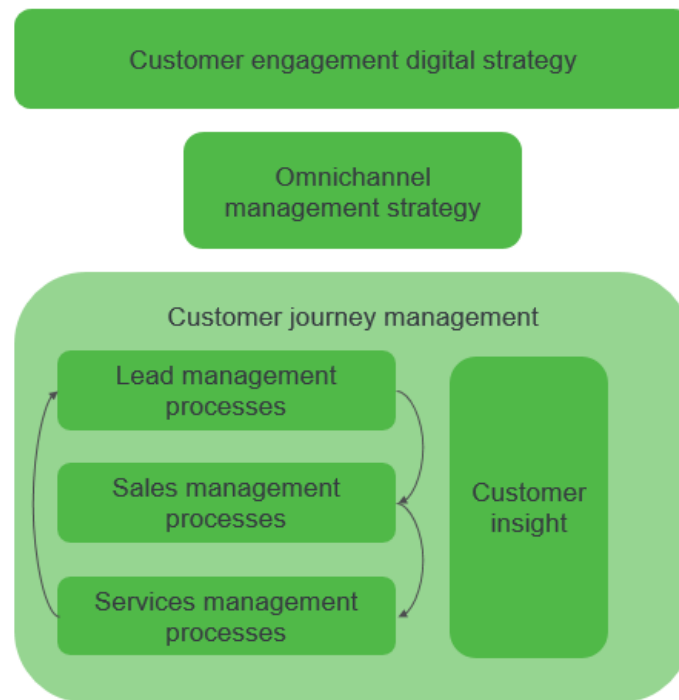
Content creation and content management competences are needed in the customer insight department because lead nurturing activities rely heavily on content. Content can also be considered as fuel of marketing automation tool which emphasizes the need for good quality content creators. Presence of IT is also necessary as it was discussed earlier. IT has a crucial collaboration role with business stakeholders to ensure that everything goes according to plan technology-wise during the development initiative and beyond in the customer insight department. IT also provides new digital tools and other digital capabilities for business stakeholders to develop and improve business processes further after the development initiative.

Data engineering as well as business analytics are also included in the necessary skillset of a customer insight team. As every decision should be data-driven, there is an enormous need for data engineering to drive insight and identify patterns in the data that can be leveraged in improving customer experience using analytics. Data engineering and data analytics should have dedicated roles for extracting value from the abundance of data that is to be gathered across each touchpoint from all interaction channels. Therefore, employees of the performance centers that were introduced earlier, should also have a representation in the customer insight teams or departments, as they supposedly monitor the data from the installed base. User experience designers should also be an important part of a customer insight team, because digital user interfaces need to be constantly developed to adapt to changing customer preferences. Certain recruitments are likely to be needed to acquire all desired competences, such as data engineering and analytics specialists.

New roles in addition to data engineering, analysts and user experience specialists are related to new processes that are being developed as a part of the development initiative and channel management from omnichannel perspective. These roles are e.g. lead management process owners, digital customer experience specialists, customer journey architects, digital care model developers and omnichannel experience managers that are responsible for developing and managing the new processes and channels that enable digital lead management and omnichannel experience capabilities. Some of these new roles, at least lead management process owners, could be situated within the customer insight department. These customer insight people together should formulate an understanding of customer's behaviour and needs throughout the customer's buying process and formulate the data-driven customer-360 view to manage and improve customer experiences collectively.

### 7.2.3 Processes and care models

Third phase of the action plan is to develop key processes and care models. Omnichannel customer experience management is not linear in nature so putting omnichannel management activities in a process context is not applicable. However, omnichannel experience strategy should steer the key customer journey management processes, such as lead management process, sales management process and service management processes (figure 18) out of which the lead management process is in the scope of this thesis.



**Figure 18.** Customer journey management processes.

As it was discussed in chapter 7.2.1, omnichannel experience related activities should originate from digital strategy and act as a baseline for customer journey management. Secondly, lead management is one of the key processes within the customer journey management context. Lead management processes are divided in sub-processes that are lead generation, lead identification, lead qualification and lead nurturing. Each of the key processes should have a dedicated process owner that is responsible of managing and developing the processes on a high level. Process owners have crucial roles within the customer insight team and they can have e.g. marketing or sales background as well as a data-driven mindset and understanding of customer's business and the industry trends.

Sub-processes could have dedicated process owner roles as well; however, they do not necessarily need to be located in the customer insight department. For example, various employees that operate in customer interface could and should have lead generation responsibilities as a part of their daily job, even if they do not belong to the customer insight department. Lead nurturing responsibilities can also be divided among several employees

between sales, marketing and external communications departments. However, lead nurturing could also benefit from having separate process owners with teams consisting of marketing, sales and content creator specialists, because lead nurturing encompasses nurturing both new and existing customers and these two types of nurturing rely on different kind of content and care models. Process owners have the responsibility of managing and developing the whole end-to-end process, which means that they must be visionary and understand customers' business and behaviour.

Lead management sub-processes can be approached from two perspectives – new customers and existing customers. Therefore, for entirely new suspects, the focus for lead generation should be on being found with ease within digital channels (e.g. focusing on social media marketing, campaigns and search engine visibility) and enabling customer-closeness. As automating lead management activities was one of the main business targets, lead generation among new potential customers and low-profit customers should be automated as much as possible using digital content and sufficient tools to distribute and promote it.

The principles for new lead generation apply also for existing customers but from existing customer perspective there are also other focus areas to be noted in lead generation. One key objective from both existing and new customers' perspective should be to focus on finding decision makers and other key stakeholders from customer companies as efficiently as possible using digital tools. However, when found (suspect generated), it is preferable to let the decision makers initiate the contact since customer-initiated contacts have usually a more positive impact on customer experience. This can be achieved by systematically providing engaging, personalized digital content through digital channels for them to build their awareness and interest. Another focus points for existing customers are e.g. account-based marketing strategies for key customers as well as targeted product promotion or marketing campaigns based on purchase history data. At a later time, when the customer portal is in use, it should also be leveraged for lead generation for existing customers by providing relevant content through the portal.

Lead identification is heavily based on data, which means that it requires data engineering and analytics capabilities. The key focus areas in lead identification for new customers should be to gather data from every touchpoint and analyze it to map out customers' journeys through different channels and identifying suspects, prospects and leads. For existing customers, digital channel behavior should be combined with purchase history data and installed based data to identify potential leads

Lead identification is a necessary pre-requisite for a lead scoring process. Leads need to be properly identified to be able to score them and rank them by relevance or importance based on that score. Lead scoring and care models are closely related to each other. Care models represent the paths that customers take on their journey, e.g. through which chan-

nel a potential lead entered the journey and what type of content the customer was interested in. The purpose of lead scoring is to assign different scores to leads based on consumed content and other type of channel behavior as well as a customer persona. These leads should then be ranked (automatically) to adjust their nurturing processes accordingly and to monitor which leads are the most potential from sales perspective. Care models are discussed more thoroughly further on. Lead scoring is the foundation for efficient lead qualification and nurturing.

Lead qualification is a critical part in an efficient and successful lead management process. Key focus area in lead qualification process is to systematically define criteria based on lead scoring that qualifies or disqualifies a sales ready lead. The goal should be to nurture each lead based on pre-defined care models to make them sales ready using adequate digital tools. Lead qualification relies on customer data, customer insight and customer personas. When a lead's score that is generated based on these components exceeds a certain pre-defined level, it indicates that the lead is sales ready and then the status of the lead should automatically be updated to sales ready in MA and CRM systems to be contacted by sales people. The target should be to focus on most potential leads and allocate sales resources only to them whereas leads with lower scores should be nurtured further with minimal human resources. Lead generation and nurturing always create costs (technology, tools, licenses, content creation etc.), so it is important to be able to qualify sales ready leads accurately and efficiently to minimize these costs. Cost per lead is one valuable indicator for lead management.

Lead nurturing should begin the moment a suspect, a prospect or a lead is identified. Thus, lead nurturing encompasses also suspect and prospect nurturing. Lead nurturing arguably has the most crucial role in lead management, since nurturing improves the quality of leads and nurtured leads are more likely to transform into sales opportunities and deals (e.g. Järvinen & Taiminen 2015). Lead nurturing process can be divided into more specific sub-processes, as figure 16 presents, which are visitor to suspect, suspect to prospect, prospect to lead and lead to sales opportunity. Opportunity to order process is out of the scope of lead nurturing. Each of these sub-processes should have their own types of content strategies, e.g. suspect to prospect phase should have mostly connecting content, prospect to lead should have mostly educating content and lead to deal should have mostly content that focuses on closing the deal, such as in-depth case studies or free trials. Key focus areas when developing lead nurturing processes is to create versatile content for all customers to each phase of the customer journey, automate nurturing actions and set clear nurturing targets and guidelines for key customers to improve lead volume and maximize lead quality.

The goal of lead nurturing should be to present the right content to the right person at the right time, which means that the customer's actual journey and behavior has to be identified in order to nurture leads properly. Lead nurturing actions should rely on pre-defined

customer care models. Care models on the other hand should be based on behavioral attributes during the customers' journeys, such as how does the lead navigate between different digital channels or how did the lead end up on the website (e.g. organic search, paid search, referral). In order to develop care models, customers' behavior should be fairly well anticipated. Thus, care model development requires a lot of analyzing customer data, insight and knowledge as well as industry data, insight and knowledge. Care models should be personalized, therefore different care models should be based on customer personas and customer segments.

Customer personas should be defined based on different organizational levels of customer organizations and nurturing principles should be adjusted accordingly, e.g. executive level employees have different kind of care models and lead scoring principles than a product manager or a mill manager. Care models should aim to anticipate the behavior of key stakeholders from customer organizations to build their interest proactively. By analyzing the customer behavior, it is crucial to gain understanding of the personal tendencies and how the customer wishes to do business. Customer persona based care models therefore enable shifting towards social selling, which has a positive impact on customer experience. Customer persona based care models work best among existing customers. Existing customers are arguably the most loyal and profitable ones and therefore putting an effort to defining customer personas for key customers is necessary.

*External participant 2: "Importance of identifying customer personas is unquestionable. The worst-case scenario would be to acquire new software for lead management but have no idea what to do with new leads [because of lack of care models]"*

Defining customer personas itself is one form of segmenting customers for the target organization. However, for more effective lead nurturing, especially for new suspects, prospects and leads, there should be more segmenting principles than customer personas. Current customer segmentation that is based on customer industry and importance ranking is a valid basis for creating new care models. Lower-tier customers should be targeted with specific and automated care models that aim to build trust, create interdependence and integrity as well as to improve communication culture between the target organization and customer by nurturing them according to care models relevant to them. Care models should always adapt to changing behavior of customers, which is why constant monitoring, iteration and development is needed.

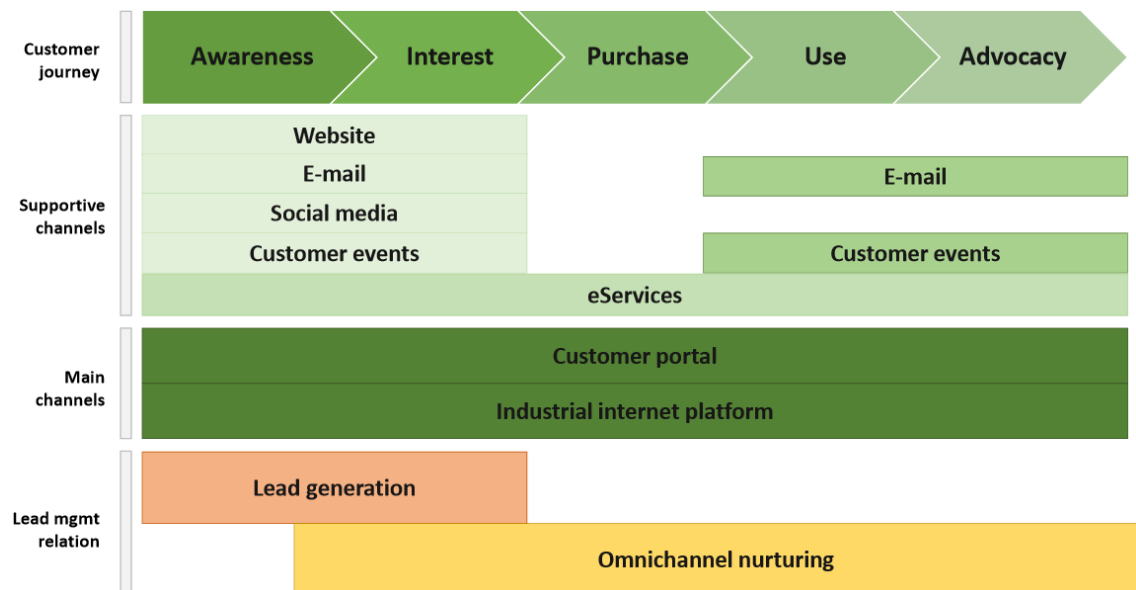
#### **7.2.4 Channels**

Determining a channel strategy for ensuring seamless omnichannel experience and improving lead generation and nurturing is the fourth phase of the action plan. Key focus areas are defining the most potential channels that could be leveraged for lead generation, setting lead generation targets for these digital channels, identifying key channels for



providing an omnichannel experience, ensuring consistency of channels and determining channel development principles as well as responsibilities.

Omnichannel experience is most strongly associated with existing customers that already have installed base because a complete omnichannel experience is a combination of seamless experience between digital and physical channels and without having any installed base the physical component is nonexistent. The main channels for omnichannel experience should be customer portal and industrial internet platform. Supportive channels are website, eServices, social media channels that are currently in use (YouTube, LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook) and customer events. Figure 19 depicts the channels through which omnichannel experience should be created for customers during the customer journey.



**Figure 19.** Channel portfolio for omnichannel experience for the target organization.

The two main channels, customer portal and industrial internet platform are utilized throughout the customer journey and they have a decisive role in creating the 360-view of customers as well as ensuring the seamlessness and unity of the experience across the journey. The supportive channels should be harnessed mostly in lead generation during the early stages of customer journey. Customer events and e-mails can be utilized also in post-sales stage when promoting e.g. relevant training sessions and other onboarding content as well as promoting new solutions for future. eServices is a more comprehensive channel as it can be harnessed throughout the customer journey. During pre-purchase stage, eServices can be leveraged in new lead generation by building awareness and interest towards potential (spare part) solutions. During purchase phase, the aim of eServices is to make purchases as effortless as possible. During post-purchase stage, together with customer portal and industrial internet platform, the aim of eServices is to make targeted offers to customer based on data and thus have a positive impact on the total customer experience. eServices could also be leveraged in other business than merely

spare parts, which makes it even a more significant channel for later phases of the customer journey in the future.

Figure 19 depicts also the relation between omnichannel experience and lead management. The two main channels have a significant role also in lead generation and nurturing activities, since they are the most immediate channels for contacting and interacting with the target organization. eServices also have a comprehensive role in lead generation as well as data-driven nurturing, as it was disclosed above. Based on empirical findings and backed up by theoretical findings, other relevant channels for lead generation purposes are website, e-mail and social media channels. E-mail as well as customer events are also harnessed in nurturing customers to generate additional sales by providing personalized offers and other experiences to customers.

All supportive channels should be integrated with the two main channels to ensure timely information during different phases of the customer journey. Therefore, channel management should be unified to ensure seamless experience across them. Practically it means that all customer data should be gathered from each channel, store that data on a same platform so that it is easily accessible for analysis, analyzing customer behavior by channel and developing channels based on customer preferences. Channel managers need to have an open communication culture to enable sufficient information sharing and uniform development actions. Only by analyzing data from all touchpoints across all channels, both offline and online, valid customer journeys can be mapped for different customers and customer personas. As one business target was to identify key decision makers from customer organizations, analyzing their channel preferences is a major part of understanding their behavior and being able to nurture them according to their preferences.

For entirely new suspects, the feeling of omnichannel experience is created by unifying the experience between all digital channels available, that are practically all supportive channels mentioned above. Gathering and analyzing data across these channels is as crucial as it is among existing customers and to gather data from every channel. Therefore, when new suspects begin their journey, their channel behavior is constantly monitored and analyzed, they are being assigned to different care models based on their behavior and they are nurtured as effectively as possible by providing relevant and personalized content according to the care models. All this supposedly has a positive impact on customers' experiences during their journeys. As the scores of the potential leads increase and they become sales ready, the sales people already know the preferences of the certain customers and can ensure the seamless customer experience also throughout the purchase stage of the customer journey.

The principle for omnichannel experience from channel perspective is to be always present by integrating all channels. This ensures that there are no undesirable gaps in the experience environment. Interaction channel of choice should feel right for the moment

at all times for the customer and that can be achieved by systematically leveraging channel behaviour data in developing customer care models.

### 7.2.5 Toolset

Determining and acquiring a digital toolset is the fifth phase of the action plan. The toolset should be acquired after proper qualifications for the software are being defined. After the first four phases, the most important qualifications and requirements for the tools to be acquired, such as needed features and number of software licenses, are therefore well known. As figure 14 indicated, the technological backbone is currently at a decent level, which means that no major investments in new platforms are needed in the near future. However, what is needed are proper systems and software for executing the omnichannel and lead management targets. The most important and therefore first software to acquire should be marketing automation (MA) software with sufficient CRM integration abilities and a possibility to integrate other supportive tools such as advanced website tracking and web analytics software with it.

The desired digital toolset should enable systematic use of data, which means that the tool should have capabilities to gather data from all digital channels, integrate them with data from operational systems (mainly CRM and process data from customers) and draw insight from the data using analytical capabilities. The toolset should also be able to automate activities within lead management sub-processes, such as lead generation and identification, lead nurturing, lead qualification and scoring. Therefore, the toolset should enable creating the data-driven customer care models and map customer journeys, have automated lead scoring and nurturing and ability to create diverse reports for decision making. Other important aspects to be considered when deciding the toolset are ease of use, availability of support and training as well as pricing mechanisms. At least majority of the features mentioned above are included in high quality MA software, such as Pardot, Salesforce Marketing Cloud, Hubspot or Marketo.

Pardot or Salesforce Marketing Cloud would be the most logical option for MA for the target organization, because they are Salesforce products and there is already a Salesforce platform in use in the target organization. Based on empirical findings, Pardot is recommended when there is also a Salesforce CRM in use because of the ease of integrating functionalities between MA and CRM software. Pardot and Salesforce Marketing Cloud also allow vast amount of integrations to other lead management and omnichannel management tools, which is beneficial when expanding the marketing and sales technology stack in the future.

The primary goal of marketing automation for the target organization should be to create additional sales among existing customers cost-efficiently by nurturing the customer relationships. The secondary goal would be to generate and capture entirely new suspects

and nurture them to leads and deals. However, considering the characteristics of the industries and markets that the target organization operates in, it would be unrealistic to assume that major improvements to lead volume among totally new suspects could be achieved. The growth of the customer industries and the players in the markets are well known and most of the key players are already existing customers of the target organization, at least in majority of the business lines. Therefore, focusing on existing customers rather than trying to generate new potential suspects from void is expected to be far more beneficial.

### **7.2.6 Pilot**

The last phase of the action plan is to execute a pilot project in the business unit that was determined during strategy phase. Before go-live of the pilot, clear business targets and scope have to be set, both internal and external stakeholders must be defined and development initiative team with sufficient competences and mindsets has to be in place. New processes and care models with relevant content should be defined, most important channels for lead generation and omnichannel experience are determined, channel strategy is developed for omnichannel experience and responsibilities are set for managing and developing processes, care models and channels. Lastly, when phases one to four are conducted a sufficient toolset has to be determined, implemented and tested. Only when the toolset is proven to be functioning with all the qualifications and features from previous phases, the pilot should be executed.

As figure 17 shows, testing is an important part of executing the action plan. Testing is emphasized during phases three to six and is extremely important during the pilot phase. One suggested principle for testing is conducting simple A/B tests, e.g. when testing which content is working to which customers in care models during the pilot phase. Testing is crucial also because these digital development activities are entirely unprecedented in the organization to compensate the lack of experience from these types of major initiatives. An experimental culture during the development initiative when finding out the best practices is therefore recommended.

The main objective of the pilot is to achieve results fast. Monitoring customer actions and iterating processes and care models based on them is important. When results are achieved, communicating the success to other business units to build internal awareness is important. After successful pilot, the development initiative should be extended other business units, to improve lead management throughout the organization. When extending to solution business, the differing characteristics of business should be taken into consideration. As sales processes in solution business are long, the aim should be to nurture the decision makers proactively to assist the investment, which means that the customer and their position in their customer journey should be known precisely.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

This chapter summarizes the key conclusions of the research by answering the research questions based on theoretical and empirical findings. The main research question is answered based on answers for the supportive research questions.

### 8.1 Research conclusion

The main goal of this thesis was to formulate answers on how to enhance current lead management activities and create an omnichannel customer experience by utilizing digital technologies in the target organization. In a question format the main research question was “*How to enhance lead and customer nurturing activities for creating an omnichannel customer experience in B2B context using digital technologies?*” Answers to the main research question were formulated by answering the supportive research questions and based on empirical findings in form of action plan and target state proposals in chapter 7.

The first supportive research question (RQ 2) was mainly answered based on theoretical findings in chapter 2. Second research question (RQ 3) was also answered mainly based previous on theoretical findings in chapter 3. Remaining supportive research questions (RQ4 and RQ 5) were answered both based on literature (chapter 4) and empirical findings (chapters 6 and 7). Chapter 8.1 provides summarized answers to these research questions.

Research question 2 was “*What are the main elements of B2B customer experience?*” and it was answered based on findings from chapter 2. The importance of customer experience as a competitive asset for every company was widely recognized. Customer experience was identified as a multidimensional construct that is composed of customer’s experiences on e.g. social, emotional, cognitional and physical levels (e.g. Lemon & Verhoef 2016). Customer experience consists of interactions at different touchpoints during a customer journey. In the literature, it was also recognized that the concept of value has also shifted towards providing experiences rather than solutions and companies are more and more actively moving towards value-in-use model of value creation by co-creating value with customers.

B2B companies were first to recognize the value-in-use model of value creation (Vargo & Lusch 2008), which is the first characteristic of a B2B customer experience. Value-in-use model can be divided to certain customer experience factors from B2B perspective. These factors are interactive experience environment, emotional cohesion as well as customization and personalization. Other B2B customer experience factors from the literature are understanding customer needs, ease of doing business, customer knowledge, value for time and promise fulfillment (see e.g. table 3).

The eight B2B customer experience factors share certain similarities that the theoretical findings support. The B2B customer experience factors formulate the basis for a high quality B2B customer experience. On top of the basis, there were four B2B customer experience building blocks recognized, based on previous literature. These building blocks are communication, interdependence, trust and integrity (see figure 5).

Thus, to conclude, based on theoretical findings, the answer to RQ 2 is that the main elements of a B2B customer experience consist of eight customer experience factors (understanding customer needs, customer knowledge, customization and personalization, interactive experience environment, value for time, emotional cohesion and promise fulfillment) together with four building blocks that are communication, interdependence, trust and integrity.

Research question 3 was “*What kind of organizational requirements does creation of a digitalized customer experience have on traditional organizations?*” and the answers to this question are based on theoretical findings from chapter 3. As chapter 3 comprehensively disclosed, there are several organizational requirements when aiming at creating a digital customer experience in digitally maturing organizations, whose core business is not digital. According to literature, digitalization is disrupting every organization as it enables new ways of doing business but at the same time it is a major challenge for (traditional) companies and requires a lot of change management to adapt new, digital ways of working.

Figure 8 introduced the requirements that were identified in the literature for creating a digital customer experience. First of all, creating digital customer experience depends on experimental organizational culture that embraces digitalization. Having a digital strategy is crucial when creating a digital customer experience. Based on theoretical findings the digital strategy when aiming at a digital customer experience should be formulated from a customer engagement perspective, which aims to improve customer loyalty and customer relationships by providing personalized experiences to customers using digital capabilities.

Introducing a digital dimension to customer experience relies heavily on having robust information systems and platforms that enable efficient utilization of customer data. Digital customer experience relies on a digital services backbone that extracts data from operational information systems (e.g. CRM, ERP) and other data sources such as sensor data from installed base or other end-user data and combines these data in a way that enables a personalized customer experience. However, theoretical findings pointed out that creating a digital customer experience is not all about culture, strategy and technologies. Other crucial components are dedicated roles and responsibilities, sufficient digital skills and adequate internal processes.

Thus, the summarized answer to RQ 3 is that the organizational requirements for creating a digitalized customer experience are an experimental organizational culture, sufficient corporate and digital strategies, robust operational and digital services backbones that enable gathering customer data and insight as well as providing personalized digital experiences. Other organizational requirements are adequate digital competences, roles and responsibilities to define efficient internal processes that utilize the new digital capabilities that enable the digitalization of customer experience.

Research question 4 was “*What digital capabilities are needed for automating lead management activities?*” and the answer to that question was formulated based on theoretical as well as empirical findings. Digital capabilities in this context incorporates digital competences and digital technologies. Lead management activities encompass the main sub-processes of a lead management process that were identified in the literature. These sub-processes are lead generation, lead identification, lead scoring, lead qualification and lead nurturing. Empirical findings pointed out that automated lead management should be a sought-after state of lead management processes.

Answering research question 3 it was discovered that creating a digital dimension to customer experience has several organizational requirements. One of these requirements was having robust technologies, platforms and information systems whereas sufficient digital competences were also identified as a requirement for digitalizing customer experience (see figure 8). Based on theoretical and empirical findings, best practices in lead management rely on digital technologies and tools. Empirical findings emphasized that lead management can be examined from two perspectives that are existing customers and entirely new suspects. Lead management principles differ by the perspective to some extent, as e.g. lead nurturing activities depend on how much is known (e.g. industry, company name, decision maker, installed base, investment plans, channel preferences) about the lead.

Various lead management sub-process, e.g. generation, qualification and nurturing can be automated to some extent with sufficient digital tools and digital competences. The most significant digital tool from automation point of view was a marketing automation software. Based on theoretical and empirical findings, required digital competences to enable and capitalize on automated lead management activities are e.g. digital content creation and analytics. Automating lead management activities also require well defined processes and care models that are aligned with customers’ journeys. Thus, to summarize, the answer to RQ 4 is that based on theoretical and empirical findings, digital tools, most importantly marketing automation software as well as proper lead management processes and care models combined with relevant digital competences are required to be able to automate the lead management activities.

Research question 5 was “*How to create an omnichannel customer experience in a B2B context?*” and the answers to that question were formulated based on both theoretical and

empirical findings. Omnichannel customer experience was identified as providing a consistent, seamless and personalized experience at every touchpoint across all interaction channels between a customer and a company. Omnichannel experience aims to create a superior customer experience that reduces risk of losing a lead during their purchasing journey as well as encourages the customer to proceed in their journey by providing them a seamless and personalized experience. Omnichannel experience allows customers to gather information easily through chosen channel. As digital interaction channels have an increasing importance during customers' journeys in today's business, omnichannel customer experience is usually perceived being created across digital channels.

Previous literature pointed out that omnichannel management refers to integrated management of company's interaction channels (Mirsch et al. 2016) and empirical findings supported the finding that channel management should be unified to create an omnichannel customer experience to achieve the seamlessness and unity of the total experience. Personalization of the customer experience requires a lot of customer data and insight as well as content creation competences to provide relevant, personalized content to the right customer stakeholder at a right time on the right channel. Empirical findings pointed out that omnipresence at customer's site has a significant impact on customer experience, which means that channel portfolio needs to be sufficient to enable the omnipresence and ease of contacting the supplier company at any time through any given channel according to customer's channel preferences.

Thus, to conclude, the answer to RQ 5 is that to create an omnichannel customer experience for a B2B customer, the experience needs to be seamless, unified and personalized throughout the customer journey. There needs to be sufficient channels for customers to gather information and proceed on their customer journeys at any given point of time to enable omnipresence. Channel management needs to be unified and consistent to enable a seamless experience. Personalization is also a key requirement for an omnichannel customer experience. Therefore, gathering and analyzing data across every touchpoint on the customer journey is necessary as well as utilizing other customer data to create the personalized experience based on data.

The main research question was *"How to enhance lead nurturing activities for creating an omnichannel customer experience in B2B context using digital technologies?"* and the answer is formulated based on answers on the supportive research questions answered above as well as empirical findings that were presented in chapter 7. When considering the part *"enhancing lead nurturing activities"* of the research question, the first step is to have proper lead nurturing processes to be enhanced, which is usually not the case in low or moderate digital maturity companies. The action plan for implementing sufficient lead nurturing processes was described in the action plan that was introduced in chapter 7 (figure 17).



Enhancing lead nurturing activities starts from setting clear targets by determining what is the financial potential of enhancing lead management activities. In the case of the target organization, the most significant financial potential was to achieve upselling and cross-selling with fewer costs due to automated lead management activities by increasing lead volume and lead quality among existing customers. There should be one key numerical business target set in the beginning of the action plan, e.g. *“increasing sales opportunities by 10% in digital channels”*. In some cases, the primary financial target could be to increase the customer base by generating entirely new leads. Defining lead management processes also requires competent employees and other resources.

As the answers to RQ 4 concluded, lead nurturing is a sub-process of lead management. Empirical and theoretical findings pointed out that lead nurturing relies on pre-defined care models that should be based on customer personas and customer segments. Therefore, developing diverse and multi-dimensional customer care models are the basis for successful lead nurturing. Answers to RQ 4 also concluded that automating lead management processes implies enhancing the performance and efficiency of the process. Therefore, enhancing lead nurturing activities requires automating them.

Enhancing lead nurturing activities from omnichannel perspective requires unified nurturing across all interaction channels. Customers should be able to decide which interaction channels they prefer and use and nurturing activities should adapt to these channel preferences. Therefore, care models should adapt to different channels to enable a seamless and personalized experience, which are associated to omnichannel experience.

As the answers to the supportive research questions concluded, utilizing digital technologies is necessary for enhancing lead nurturing activities. Marketing automation tool was identified as the most important tool for enhancing lead nurturing activities in order to create an omnichannel customer experience. However, as the empirical findings pointed out, digital technologies are only enablers for enhancing lead nurturing activities and the previous phases of the action plan before implementing the toolset (figure 17) are more important when aiming for success than solely investing in technologies without proper planning.

## 8.2 Evaluation of the results

The research objective was to determine how the target organization could enhance its current lead nurturing activities for creating an omnichannel customer experience using digital technologies. The main research question was *“How to enhance lead nurturing activities for creating an omnichannel customer experience in B2B context using digital technologies?”* and comprehensive answers were formulated to the research question in the empirical part of the thesis. The outcome of the thesis was twofold, a proposal for a desired target state of lead management and omnichannel experience activities as well as an action plan proposal for achieving the target state.

To evaluate the results of the study, reliability of the study needs to be addressed. Reliability means that when one person is interviewed twice, the results of both interviews are the same (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008, p. 186). In this study interviewees were interviewed once. From this perspective, one thing that affects the reliability is that time affects reality. It means that the business environment is constantly under some type of change, and therefore some of the interview results may have become outdated. However, this study was conducted in a time period of 6 months, which means that the reliability should be at a decent level, because it can be assumed that if the interviewees were to be interviewed again at the end of this study, the results would be really similar than the first time.

The study that was conducted in this thesis reached its objectives, as it was concluded in chapter 8.1. The research questions were answered comprehensively based on theoretical and empirical findings. However, digital lead management as well as omnichannel customer experience and customer journeys in general are fairly novel topics in the target organization. Therefore, the expertise about these fields are limited and may affect the reliability of the interview results. Another thing that may have had an impact on the reliability of the results is that no customers were interviewed as a part of this study. However, many of the empirical findings were backed up by the theoretical findings, which increases the reliability of the results.

Despite the results being considered fairly reliable, the generalizability of this study is limited to some extent. This research was a single case study for one organization, which means that the sample size is insufficient to be generalized to all other companies that are dealing with digital lead management and omnichannel experience related challenges. The results were customized for the target company to some extent, but other B2B companies that are at a similar digital maturity level, could benefit from the results of this thesis. Both the action plan proposal as well as the depiction of the target states of lead management and omnichannel experience are quite straightforward to follow and implement in a B2B company of similar digital maturity level.

### **8.3 Future research topics**

This thesis focused on the pre-purchase phase of a customer journey from omnichannel customer experience and digital lead management perspective. Potential future research topics of in the fields of customer journeys, lead management and omnichannel experience are diverse from either technological or organizational perspective.

First of all, academic research on customer journeys is scarce. Research has focused on customer experience from value creation point of view, but extensive research is lacking on how value is created at different stages of a customer's journey. Customer journeys as well as customer experience in general are also studied less from B2B than B2C perspective. Therefore, future research potential lies on how customer journeys are formulated and how customer experience is generated in a customer journey format, especially in

B2B context. There is a lot of research potential in omnichannel customer experience from B2B perspective, since majority of the previous research has approached omnichannel experience from B2C context, such as retailing business.

Despite being a common concept in B2B business, B2B lead management has not been extensively studied from academic perspective. There is future research potential in examining B2B lead management processes, especially lead nurturing activities and customer care models. Previous research related to lead nurturing and customer care models is scarce, even though it has a major role in lead management and managing customer relationships in digitalized business environments.

Digital technologies that enable digital and omnichannel customer experience can also be researched further. Currently there is no research conducted from modern technologies perspective, such as what is the impact, significance or potential of analytics or artificial intelligence when improving customer experience for B2B customers. There is research potential also in more in-depth research of industrial internet solutions that contribute to customer experience, such as touchpoints on installed base, and how machine-to-machine conversations can be leveraged in creating an omnichannel customer experience. Sensor-based customer care models are a potential future research topic.

Lastly, as creating an omnichannel experience and improving lead nurturing activities rely heavily on gathering data from different touchpoints during the customer journey, there is enormous research potential in how General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), that strengthens the data protection principles of individuals affects these fields. Supposedly GDPR affects data acquisition and management policies and therefore may cause challenges in customer care model development and personalizing customer interactions.

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## **APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW OUTLINE**

### **Topic 1: Lead management**

- Where do leads come from? How are leads identified and monitored?
- How are leads managed? Are there any defined processes for lead management?
- Who is/should be responsible for lead management?
- What information systems or tools are involved or utilized in lead management activities?
- What are the most interesting things to know about a lead? How easy it is to get that information?
- What are the main challenges in lead management?
- Are there any practical case examples of a real lead management process?
- What is lead conversion rate at the moment? How is it measured?
- What kind of targets are there for lead management and nurturing?
- Is there any analysis conducted on from where leads are generated?

### **Topic 2: Customer relationship management and nurturing**

- How is CRM/customer data leveraged in sales? How could it be utilized better?
- What are the main challenges in customer relationship management?
- How is customer behavior monitored?
- The role of portals / customer communities in the future in customer relationship management and nurturing?
- How are customers segmented? Why? How do marketing efforts differ based on customer segments?
- How are customer experiences personalized at the moment?
- Are there any targeted or digital marketing conducted based on customer data? How could it be improved?
- Are there any metrics and/or targets for customer relationship management or nurturing?

### **Topic 3: State of operational backbone and technologies**

- What is the current state of “operational backbone” that supports business processes and enabling a consistent customer experience?
- What is the state of current “customer experience technologies”?
- Where does customer data come from?
- What kind of customer data / customer care actions etc. are stored in CRM system? What kind of data should be stored?
- What kind of other data sources are there? What kind of other data repositories are utilized?
- How is customer data analyzed for improving customer experience or customer relationship?
- Who manages customer data?
- Sensor data, web data, social media data and other external data - How are these analyzed, combined and leveraged for better customer experience or new business potential?

#### **Topic 4: Digital maturity and channels**

- What is the digital maturity level of Valmet?
- Is there business architecture around digitalization from customer experience perspective available?
- Describe the most important digital channels for lead generation in Valmet.
- How are digital leads identified and traced?
- Who manages digital channels? Is there a channel strategy implemented?
- Who manages the “spaces” between different touchpoints during the customer journey?
- What does omnichannel customer experience mean for Valmet?
- How could Valmet benefit from omnichannel strategy and management? Is there a person/people in charge of managing omnichannel activities?
- What is the state of digital marketing? How is digital content managed, monitored or measured?
- What is the role of mobile in sales/marketing/business in general?
- What is the role of social media in marketing and sales?
- What kind of data is gathered, analyzed and utilized from different channels?
- What kind of challenges are there in gathering/analyzing data from different channels?

#### **Topic 5: Digital competences**

- What kind of key competences are needed in the organization to create a digital customer experience?
- What are the current states of the competences mentioned above? What kind of actions have to be/have been taken to achieve the desired level of competence?
- Describe information flow between sales, marketing and IT. What is good and what is not? How could it be improved?
- Does business processes and organizational structures support transparent flow of information, and consistency that is required for creating a high quality digital customer experience? What could be done better?
- What do you think is the role of IT in value-creation (enabling digital customer experience etc.)?